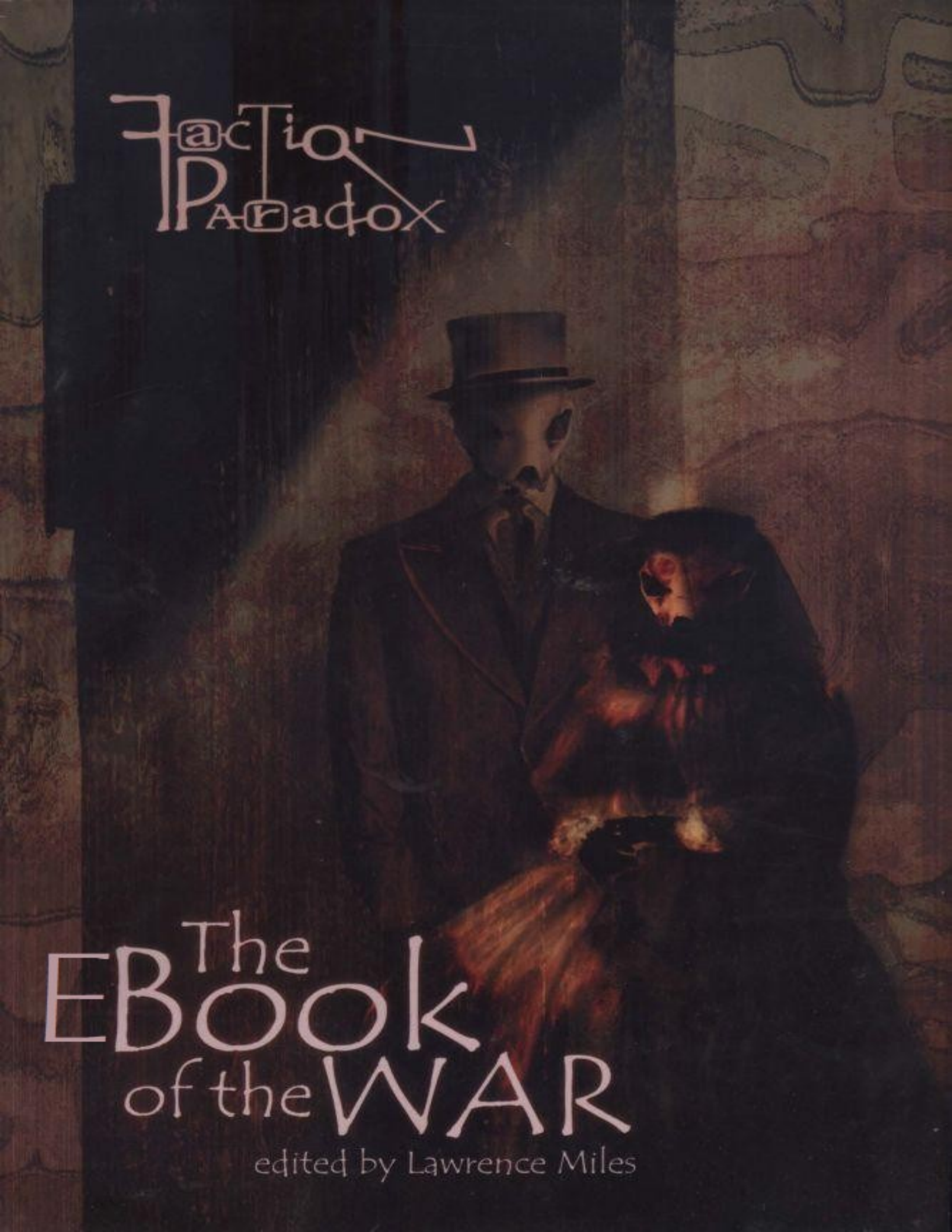
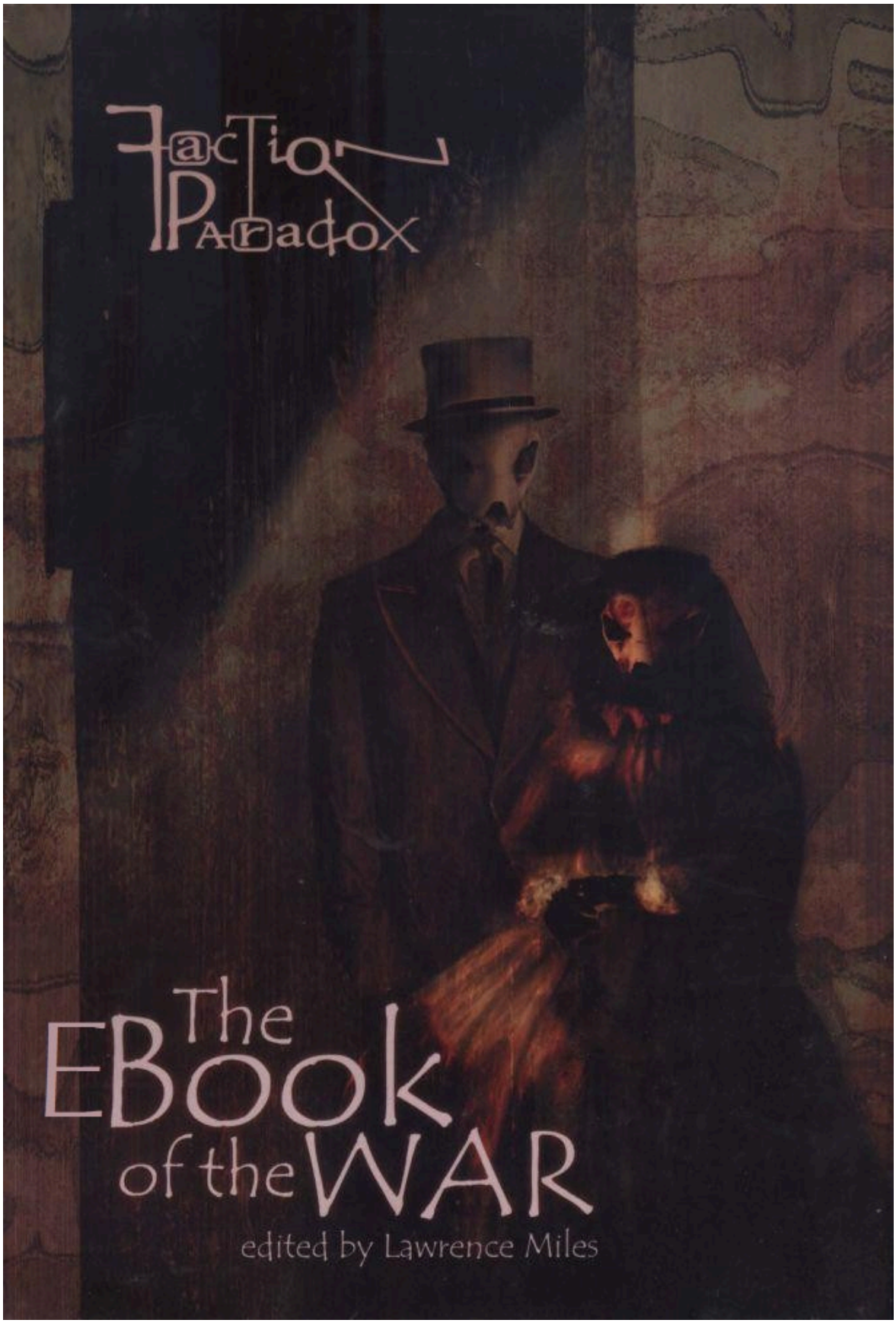

Faction Paradox
The EBook of the WAR
edited by Lawrence Miles


Faction Paradox
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Fiction
Paradox

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The editor would like to give special thanks to Andy Lane (for Cwej) and to Neil Penswick (for the Yssgaroth): and to apologise to Lance Parkin, David A. McIntee and Eddie Robson, all of whom wanted to play but whose material didn't quite fit anywhere.

The publisher would like to thank all of *The Book of the War* creators, plus that nice lady who sends him newspaper articles. You know who you are.

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The transcribers note: Sincerest apologies for breaking copyright and all, but everyone had the pdf anyway, and frankly it's about time this fandom became remotely accessible.

Causalities of War

Commemorating the First Half-Century of the Conflict

The War (and at this stage it remains *the* War, not yet having enough of its mass in a single region or era to be given a more specific title) has now been in progress for fifty years. These have to be considered definitive years, as measured by the major War-time powers, although there's certainly a span of millions of local years between the War's first intersection with the Spiral Politic and its last. The dead are already numbered in their billions; the retro-dead will never be counted; the surviving participants are best described not as "wounded" but as "changed". A timeline has been provided [see the back of this volume], although increasingly observers describe the War as a shape rather than a sequence of events, a map of causality much like the ones used by the Great Houses themselves. The suggestion has been made that the War is therefore turning every culture into a War culture, ensuring that one day every individual in recordable time will become either a child of the Houses or a child of the enemy.

For readers new to these events, the following is a quick summary of the seven most prominent War-time factions. See under their own entries for more detailed descriptions.

***The* Great Houses**

The static, aristocratic bloodlines which have – traditionally – been seen as responsible for the structure of the Spiral Politic, the Houses can be considered the central power of the War Era universe. In fact the word "bloodline" might be misleading, as it suggests something genetic and the Houses seem to have no real genetic status at all: as the society responsible for engineering history, they perceive themselves as being parts of the historical process much more than being a *people*. Voyeuristic, disinterested academicians for most of their existence, the War has not only forced the Houses to embrace the "vulgar" (i.e. physical) nature of the continuum but also inspired them to commit various acts of nervous, hurried genocide. As a result, it's fair to say that history is no longer a safe place in which to live.

Major references: The Great Houses, Closed Session of the Ruling Houses, the Homeworld, the Imperator Presidency, the Spiral Politic, Timeships, Yssgaroth.

The House Military

Safe in their enclave at the dead centre of history, in the past it's been rare for members of the Great Houses to even bother venturing outside their Homeworld (a site which is, in itself, more a focal-point for causality than an actual *place*). But though the Houses would once have considered the very idea of a "military" to be ridiculous, now their cohorts are bred for both overt and guerrilla warfare with time-active defences engineered into their bodies from day one. While the old academicians remain at a safe distance, the new children of the Houses have taken to the battlefields of the outside universe with a vengeance. If any of the lesser species still see the Houses as untouchable, inscrutable demigods – not an uncommon mistake, before the War – then the House Military are demigods of an altogether angrier kind.

Major references: The House Military, Christopher Rodonanté Cwej, Forced Regen Missions, the Ruling Houses, Robert Scarratt, Waves of the House Military, the War King.

Faction Paradox

The only House to have left the Homeworld *en masse* and defied every protocol of the ruling Houses just for the sake of it. In the years leading up to the War, it was the Faction which saw the "vulgarity" of the future and began embracing the biological curiosities of the lesser species: in a time when the Houses still thought of themselves as immortal and immutable, the Faction brought them the idea of *death*, almost in the form of a perverse carnival. The first House to recruit members from the lower human orders – the epitome of bad taste – it's now partly a criminal-terrorist organisation and partly a deliberate irritation. While the ruling Houses fight their enemy in the open, the Faction embarks on a campaign of gleeful subterfuge, presumably hoping that the larger powers will just wipe each other out.

Major references: Faction Paradox, Armour, Cousin Belial, the Eleven-Day Empire, Loa, House Paradox, the Thirteen-Day Republic.

The Celestis

By their very nature, they only exist on the sidelines of the War. Once an elite cadre among the Houses, when they realised that war was inevitable (and that the Houses might actually *lose* it) the Celestis quickly concluded that in a time-active conflict a defeat wouldn't simply destroy them but create a version of the Spiral Politic in which

n existed. Terrified, indignant and suddenly
wn mortality, they excised themselves from the
story as a “precaution”. Now they exist as little
s, impotent, self-obsessed Lords of an
in, only manifesting themselves in god-forms
rise and intimidate those individuals who’ve
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throughout history as traitors.

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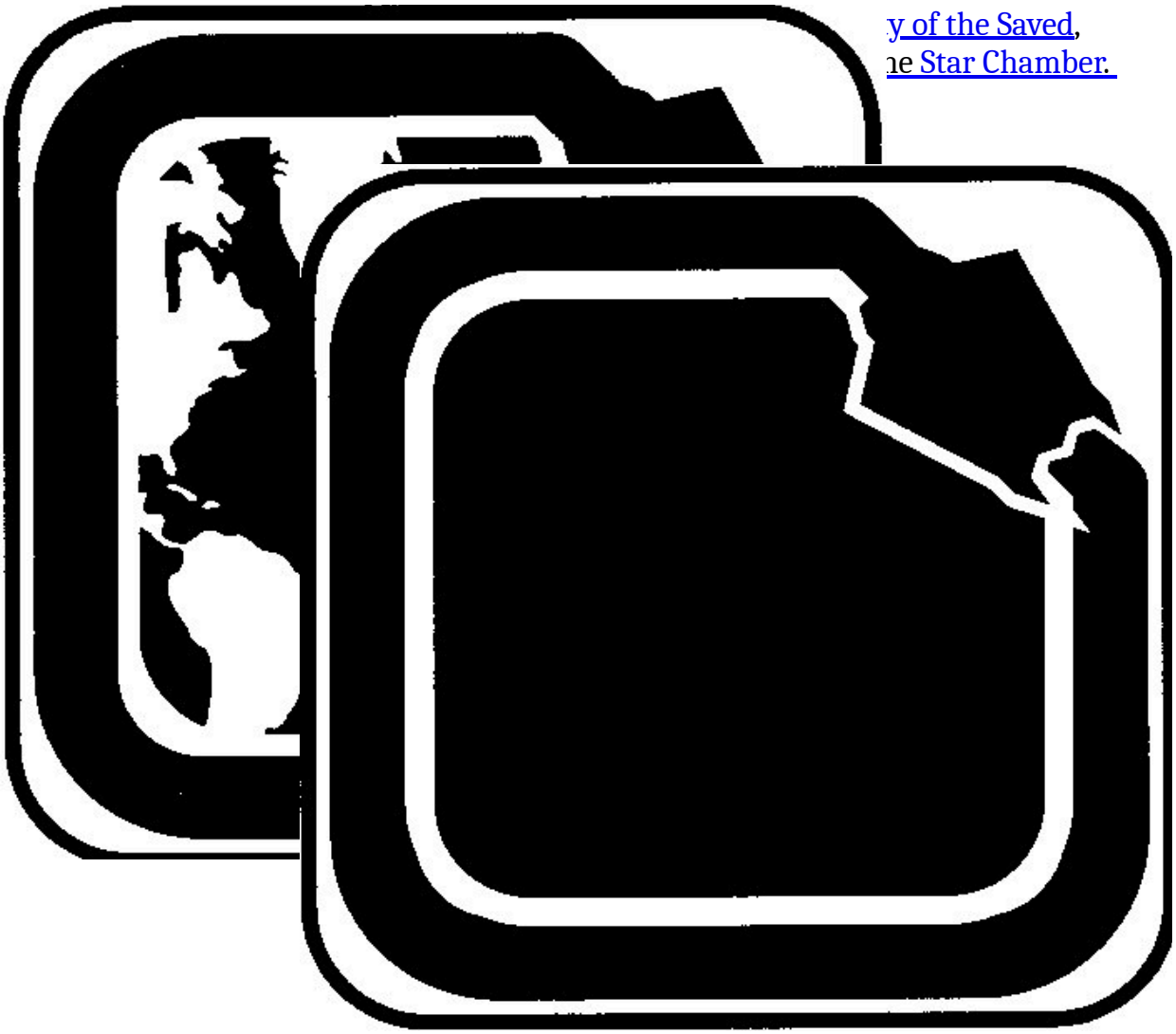
of its descendants, the *posthuman* sects. The War has already intersected human history at various points, the first diplomatic contact between Earth and the War-time groups having been made in 1752. Other human sites of interest include the City of the Saved, a region of dubious origin which exists beyond the end of causality, and which seems to act as a “backup file” for the entire human species.



y of the Saved,
ıe Star Chamber.

ACADEMICIANS FOR GAME LOGIC [*Great Houses: Group (Pre-War Era)*] In the history of most truly *cultured* cultures, there comes a point when the society develops the ability to stop and take stock of its progress: when civilisation will suddenly be able to put itself into a kind of context, to consider *what* the species believes and *why* the species believes it. Culturally speaking this process can be called "deconstruction" or "post-modernism" or just "self-awareness", but in truth it affects every aspect of a society from its art to its weapons technology to the way it remembers its own past. A "deconstructing" culture understands that nothing can ever be taken *literally*; that rituals and god-totems can be useful even if they're technically meaningless; that science, rather than being an absolute and definite truth, is only a brief working model of the universe.

Until the final Pre-War decades, the Great Houses had utterly failed to reach this stage of development. To the ruling Houses the idea that things aren't to be accepted as absolutely and literally true would have been absurd. This is hardly surprising: many of the Houses are so ancient that they created parts of the continuum's operating system themselves. Stories of the "rites of creation", which for most cultures would be pure metaphor, are in the Houses' case the ideas which primed and programmed the universe in the first place. (The fact that the Homeworld lies close to the exact centre of the Spiral Politic is significant in itself. For many cultures, the realisation that the world *isn't* at the centre of the sky is the point when that culture starts to re-think its mythology. The Homeworld has never, ever had to make this adjustment.)

It's possible that this inability to "step back" is the factor which has damned the Homeworld to several aeons of stasis. Arguably, there's only so much a society can do while it insists on thinking in absolutes. It's worth noticing, however, that all the great changes which took place in the centuries leading up to the War – the Imperator Presidency, the rise of Faction Paradox, the creation of the Celestis – have one thing in common. None of them would have been possible without the dreadful, creeping

realisation that the protocols of the Council couldn't be accepted at face value.

Only thirty years before the War, once the Houses had come to understand that a conflict was inevitable, the major bloodlines nominated the "reconciler" Devonire as their first Academician for Game Logic. Game logic is straightforward enough in itself, the theory that behaviour is governed by rules no different from game rules, and that any meeting of intelligences can be described (and predicted) as if it were a game. Yet the idea would have been unthinkable, literally unthinkable, only half a millennium earlier. *'We do not play games,'* the leading Houses might have said. *'We are the oldest authority. What we do is far more important than a game.'* But in that brief and desperate Pre-War moment, it was as if the Great Houses had finally begun to understand that they'd believed in far too many things with far too much certainty and for far too long.

And this is important, for one simple reason, which must have occurred even to the first of the Game Logic Academicians. Without game logic, *the War makes absolutely no sense*. A war, as the ruling Houses must have known, only has real meaning in a scarcity society (i.e. a society where certain key elements – food, minerals, or just territory – are finite, and "scarce" enough to justify warfare). Yet with the whole continuum at its disposal, the Great Houses had access to unlimited resources, unlimited energy and unlimited potential. The same surely must have been true of the enemy. As a result the concept of the War is, was and always will be utterly meaningless.

Unless… unless game logic is applied, and the War isn't a literal war at all. The idea that the War was begun as a kind of rite, a kind of *game*, in itself shouldn't be taken too literally: none of the War's founders began the conflict to entertain themselves. But it was, and remains, much more a war of ritual than a war of territory.

The irony, of course, is that thanks to the War the Homeworld's brief love affair with "deconstruction" was brought to an end soon after the fighting began. Five decades after the initial conflict over Dronid, the Homeworld has now reached such a brutalised state that culture and ritual are of almost no importance whatsoever. A further irony, given that the Game

Logic period was the Houses' greatest age of progress in literally millions of years, is that without "self-awareness" the enemy could never even have been properly understood.

A'DALTEM ANO'NDE [*Remote: Technology/Relic (Earth, C19)*] From the Kiowa *ano'nde* "it screams" and *a'daltem* "hair bone", this is the famous Screaming Skull rifle of Kiowa prophet Pai'ngya (Stands-in-the-Middle) said to have killed hundreds in numerous campaigns against the North American colonials in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Pai'ngya himself was most likely one of many experimental Remote troops created by Faction Paradox out of the North American warrior tribes, a project initially under the supervision of Cousin Belial.

Pai'ngya had led several successful raids against United States Army outposts and white settlements prior to his first (and some say reluctant) participation in a Ghost Dance ceremony in the summer of I875. During the second day of the Dance he experienced a vision, and gave this version to Dr. James Mooney through an interpreter in 1896:

"A *dakina* [spirit-god, a similar term to the Remote's *loa*] painted half black and half white who had the mark of the red hand over his heart told me I would do battle with a buffalo man and take his rifle. The rifle had great medicine in it and would demand a tribute in bone and blood. The song it made would call our ancestors back from the dead so that they might join with us to drive the whites from our lands forever. So said the *dakina*."

Two weeks later, Pai'ngya was in a skirmish with Negro soldiers from Fort Sill. He lost the little finger of his left hand in combat with Sergeant James Rufus Daly, whom he then scalped and killed. He took the sergeant's Sharp's carbine, a standard issue converted in the late 1860s to shoot .50/70 gauge cartridges for use in the Indian Wars. Pai'ngya made a medicine bag of Sergeant Daly's scalp, and amongst other items of totemic significance the medicine bag contained the knucklebone from Pai'ngya's severed finger. According to the prophet he was merely a tool for the medicine of Screaming Skull, an extension of the gun and not the other way around. (This fits the pattern seen in many of the Remote in later centuries, who attach a similar totem-significance to weapons captured from Great House military units. The Remote, fetishistic by their very nature and dependent on biological implants, not only treat weapons of importance as icons but often have them surgically wired to their bodies.)

From October of 1876 through January of 1879, with Pai'ngya's Screaming Skull leading the raiding parties, the Kiowa had no less than fifteen successful campaigns against territorial incursion from white settlers throughout Oklahoma and Texas. Yet historians note that the only unusual thing about the construction of the Screaming Skull rifle (not its ritual embellishments) was an attempt to erase the cartouche routinely applied to all such Sharp's converted carbines. But the prophet maintained until his death that the cartouche was erased when the shadow-spirit of Screaming Skull deserted the gun in late December, 1890: coincidentally around the time of the massacre of the Indians at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

***THE* ANALYTICAL ENGINE [*Lesser Species*: *Technology/Relic (Earth, C19)*]** Charles Babbage (1792-1871 AD) was an eclectic inventor and cryptographer considered to be the father of modern computer technology, primarily due to the partial construction of his famous *difference engine* in the early 1800s. This machine, a complex arrangement of brass and steel cogs, was a simple calculating device basically performing complex calculations by computing the differences between numbers. He was noted for displaying a simple version of this machine at evening soirees in his London home, attracting the cream of Regency society, both aristocratic and intellectual.

Yet conventional accounts are quite clear on the point that Babbage never completed his difference engine. Despite having manufactured a partial construction, Babbage instead began work on the design of a self-reprogramming machine – the analytical engine – capable of even greater feats of calculation and analysis. However, it's been concluded that due to apathy from the British government and lack of both funds and the necessary technology the project foundered, never to be undertaken.

But although government funding was indeed withheld, help was to come from one of the oldest and most powerful members of the Star Chamber, under the patronage of the aristocratic Howard family. Despite the long suppression of their religion (the Howards were staunch Catholics in a fiercely Protestant England), this family had never ceased to be a major player in British history and formed the nexus of the Chamber. Originally dedicated to protecting humanity from the threat posed by the Mal'akh – whose existence on Earth had been recorded ever since the time of the Biblical Book of Enoch – from the eighteenth century onwards the Chamber's attentions had instead been focussed on the supposed threat from Faction Paradox, whose interference in human affairs "officially" began in 1752.

The Faction's fascination with ritual and its love of macabre excess had brought about the conflict which now threatened it. The Star Chamber, seeing a cult which gloried in blood sacrifice and which openly wore the Yssgaroth-born skeletons it associated with the Mal'akh, jumped to the obvious conclusion that here, finally, it had found the heart of its enemy's

power. To the amusement of later commentators, it wasn't to be the last time an organisation would come to the wrong conclusion about the nature of its enemy. The Star Chamber already knew that it could mount an assault on the alter-time realm of the Eleven-Day Empire by using the Musical Offering, but only a calculating machine like Babbage's could run the "program" and thus open the way to the Faction's heartland.

Plans to construct such a device were disrupted first by the outbreak of war between Britain and America, then, the French Revolution. Several prominent alchemists and engineers loyal to the Chamber and its allies lost their lives in France, a catastrophe which the Chamber believed (in a typically self-obsessed fashion) to be deliberately instigated just to spite its members. Further complications arose in 1812, with the assassination of a sympathetic Prime Minister. Increasingly caught up in worldly affairs like the wars of the Napoleonic era, the Chamber had no choice but to hold off its attack on Faction Paradox until the world was a quieter place.

And in 1822 it finally found the solution it was looking for, when Charles Babbage brought to its attention his design for the difference engine and requested the funding of the government. The Chamber waited, to see if this device could be the one they needed.

By 1829, it had become patently obvious that it wasn't. Babbage's assistant was encouraged to leave his master early in 1830. He brought with him the rough outlines for a more advanced version of the Engine, which he claimed Babbage had been working in private. In 1834, the Chamber finally approached Babbage directly at one of his famous evening soirees. The means they used was the delightful and brilliant nineteen year old Ada Byron, daughter of the "late" Lord Byron.

Given her background as a child of the Grand Families, albeit the offspring of one of their renegade agents, she was trusted with the knowledge of the purpose behind the engine's construction. The resulting offensive against Faction Paradox became known by the same name which Ada rather fancifully gave to the mechanical device used to launch it: the Clockwork Ouroboros.

To date it remains the only attempted assault on the Eleven-Day Empire. It can't in all honesty be described as a great success.

ANARCHITECTS [*Celestis: Engineered Participants*] Of all the participants involved in the War, none are as misunderstood as the conceptual entities, beings/weapons which take the form of antagonistic ideas and exist only within the framework of their victims' perceptions. Those who encounter conceptual entities will often attempt to find some "solid" explanation for their existence, when in truth they operate by altering the *meanings* of things while bypassing the *matter* altogether.

Even the most hard-headed theorist is aware that matter has a component of consciousness; that only the presence of a conscious observer can collapse the many potential probability-states of an object into a "real" object; and that every perceived event therefore must have a "meaning mass" as well as a molecular mass. (In fact, separating the meaning of an object from its matter is really quite straightforward. All that's required is a time machine and a chaotic limiter.) Yet the idea that a weapon might use this principle to change the *importance* of something, without having any kind of material presence, is still difficult for many cultures to grasp.

The anarchitects are the most misunderstood of the misunderstood, simply because their effects can be so devastating that victims often refuse to believe there's no physical cause. While most conceptual entities will begin an attack by entering their victims' perceptions, the anarchitects instead occupy architecture. Architecture has a special importance for most civilised cultures: it defines how a species relates to its entire world-environment, and as a result every architectural construction is a lode-stone of high-density meaning. Anarchitects exploit this by "possessing" buildings.

This much is reasonably easy to follow. However, once an anarchitect has taken over a piece of architecture it can then alter that architecture. Bridges can disappear underfoot, simple corridors can become impenetrable labyrinths, while spaces can become oppressively small or horrifyingly large without warning. And yet the anarchitects achieve this without actually changing the substance of the building at all. To an observer the matter may seem to re-arrange itself, but in fact the matter is irrelevant and has quite simply been ignored.

If the universe notices this sudden gulf between what's *provably* there and what's *obviously* there, then it does nothing to set things right again. But then, as generations of theorists have noted, most phenomena already exist in the gap between the provable and the obvious. The anarchitects only make the process more blatant. Indeed, the lesson is so hard for some cultures to grasp that when the first crude anarchitects were encountered by posthumanity, the posthuman forces believed themselves to be under attack from some form of nanotechnology which disassembled and reassembled the architecture on a molecular level (obviously untrue, as the Celestis who engineered the early anarchitects would never have used "vulgar" technology like nanites). Only after the event did it become clear that molecules literally had nothing to do with it.

***COUSIN-THRICE-REMOVED* ANASTASIA *(1901 – "1918")* [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Early War Era)*]** Recruited during the Faction's brief flirtation with the Cult of Celebrity Death, Cousin Anastasia was a ruthless agent with a good career in front of her until she led the doomed Thirteen-Day Republic. A teenager recruited in revolutionary Russia, her full initiation involved facing the firing squad which was due to kill her and her immediate Romanov family, with no protection except for the jewellery sewn into her underwear. Surviving, she was plucked out of the blood-drenched cellar in Ekaterinburg at the moment when – had Faction Paradox not intervened – she would have recovered and then been bayoneted to death. Even at this stage, shaking after being pulled from among the corpses of her family, she showed the independent nature which would lead to her downfall: she grabbed hold of her pet dog, Jemmy, and brought the animal with her to the Eleven-Day Empire.

Anastasia was a swift learner, quickly becoming adept at the Faction's techniques under the patronage of an old family friend then known as Father Dyavol. Along with her associates Octavia and Nadim, Anastasia's valour and skill in battle was spoken of in dispatches and she seemed certain to rise to the upper levels of the Cousins, perhaps even be elevated to a Mother. She was, after all, a Dead Romanov and at this stage the Cult of Celebrity Death was still in fashion. But everything was to change after her unexpected entry into the unknown territory of the Empire's House of Lords, which immediately led to Anastasia breaking away from Faction Paradox and founding the splinter-group of the Thirteen-Day Republic. She and her fellow revolutionaries left at once, setting up shop in a "ghost" version of the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg.

Anastasia embraced her new order fervently, religiously. Initially she ran the Thirteen-Day Republic as she'd assured her fellow conspirators she would, with no hierarchy or set system of rules. This idealism was brought down by her own increasing paranoia. She came to rely only on Dyavol, her "Old Friend" from before initiation. She was frequently spotted dancing through the mirrored halls of the Palace, arguing with the thin air. Following the death of Cousin Nadim she'd address his empty chair as if he were still sat there. When the elders of Faction Paradox eventually attacked the Thirteen-Day Republic, using Anastasia's one-time friend Cousin

Octavia as its instrument, it was all Anastasia could do to wait for the battle of Valentine's Day to resolve itself. The news of Dyavol's death must have spelled out the end of the Republic even before Anastasia herself was defeated.

Having led a revolt against the Eleven-Day Empire during one of the most turbulent periods of the War, Anastasia had to be seen to pay for her transgression. As the Faction's Parliament debated her fate, she was kept locked in the prison cell inside Big Ben's clock-tower, constantly aware of the movement of time above her. Rather than grant Anastasia the mercy of never having lived at all, or the quick death back in the cellar from which she'd been brought, she was forced to live on in normal-time. She was put back into linear causality, but three times over (in a manner resembling the same "three-fold death" which befall Dyavol), each time being treated as an impostor of herself. She died in Kazan, in 1971; lived as Eleonora Albertova in Bulgaria until 1944; and as Anna Anderson died again in 1984, being cremated, tellingly, on the 14th of February.

***THE* ANCHORING OF THE THREAD [*Great Houses: Event (Pre-History)*]** In the modern Spiral Politic, it's easy to talk about history as if it were the God-given birthright of everyone in existence. But on closer inspection, it becomes clear how remarkable the engineering of such a thing must have been.

The early universe was effectively structureless, but the Great Houses seem to have known that this state of affairs wouldn't last. Given enough time it would inevitably begin to develop a definite framework, as new cultures emerged across the span of the continuum and new species began to impose their own versions of *meaning* on the continuual strata. The ever-nervous academicians of the Homeworld knew they wouldn't be alone much longer, and most likely feared how other intelligences might influence the shape of the future: in theory the coming generations of species could be so different that a collision between them and the Houses would be as catastrophic as a collision of different forms of matter. Already, early deep-time explorations performed by the Houses' pioneers had shown that there were *things* at work in the formative future, things which simply couldn't be classified or even monitored by the Houses' own technology. Attempts had occasionally been made to avert the existence of such things, often using the most violent and primitive of the early time-technologies.

But the Houses' grand solution was to create the structure of the future for themselves. They were to stitch their biologies into the substance of creation at the most fundamental level, root themselves (or at least their culture) into the continuum, build a framework through which sentient life – *their* kind of sentient life – could understand, monitor and manipulate time in the outside universe. The bonding would make them virtually indestructible, as a society if not individually: the price would be infertility and cultural stasis. For the universe to remain constant the Houses would have to remain constant as well, and indeed the entire noosphere-core of the Homeworld would have to exist outside the main body of time. Or at least, outside the meta-structure of history which they were about to create.

The machinery required for the operation ended up comprising the largest structure ever built on the Homeworld. Later accounts describe it as a whole, as one "device", though it's doubtful it was designed or constructed that way. The first exploratory vessels, the Houses' proto-timeships, had already begun attaching themselves to strategic points in the formative future. They'd become anchors, holding the structure of history in place, and the machineries erected on the Homeworld could only have been centralised versions of the same technology. But there *was* a ceremony, without doubt, one great symbolic moment when the mechanisms locked into place and all the fragments of history were connected. Lore holds that elite representatives gathered in the centre of the machine-heart to perform the bonding for all their Houses, while field agents in their vessels took their places at the other ends of the "threads". From this point on the Houses would be the ultimate surveyors, watchers of the outside universe who defined the nature of time simply by observing it, the Homeworld becoming a single, all-seeing eye set apart from the rest of history.

They no doubt saw all of this as a kind of Faustian pact, and they must have realised even then exactly how much of themselves they were giving up in order to do it. But they couldn't have known that even though their meta-structure of history would prevent the creation of rival biological forms, it would also let things far, far worse enter the continuum.

On that day, the day of the anchoring of the thread, the Yssgaroth were let into the universe. The first attack came as a primal manifestation, destroying the site of the machinery and most probably everyone involved in the process, leaving an enormous crater – the caldera – at the centre of the newborn version of history. The first War in Heaven had begun.

Once the war against the Yssgaroth had been concluded, the site of the caldera became one of the cornerstones of House culture. With the possible exception of the ceremonial armour worn by Faction Paradox, it remains the only tangible reminder that the Yssgaroth ever existed, or at least the only one which the Houses will acknowledge. Today, in the era of the second (and somewhat more subtle) War, it's proved to be prime target of the enemy and a more fundamental part of the Houses' existence than they'd ever imagined.

ANCHORMEN [*Remote: Group (Earth, C19)*] Highly-specialised male witches, first trained by the North American warrior tribes in the late nineteenth century. The anchormen were originally employed during the rituals of the peyote dream runners, who would transmit their "astral" selves across the Indian-occupied territories for communications and reconnaissance purposes (in truth probably not a spiritual process at all, but more likely an extension of the memetic connections linking the runners to the noosphere around them). In these ceremonies it would be their job to provide the peyote runners with a constant link to the world they knew, reducing the risk of the runners becoming lost in the noo-stream, although it soon became clear that the anchormen were a power in themselves. Their training allowed them to experience direct contact with the bewildering memetic landscape around them – in effect plugging themselves directly into the local culture – without becoming traumatised by the overload of high-intensity images. Although they couldn't deliver messages in the style of the peyote runners, they could certainly receive news across vast distances and relay it to the rest of their kin.

The anchormen seem to have provided, at least briefly, a bridge between the tribespeople and the "higher world" around them. It was their place to filter America's information-scape for the consumption of the individual, and as a result they soon took on a great totemic importance, giving a human face to the turbulent events taking place across the country. The military applications of this, in a time when many of the tribes believed themselves to be on the brink of extinction, are obvious. Yet the difficulty in using the anchormen as an intelligence-gathering resource was that during their news trances they lacked both focus and perspective. Trivial details were given a massively over-inflated importance just because of their emotional impact, so that a massacre of distant tribes might be seen as less significant than, say, a sick pet in the local village.

The other difficulty was that anchorman-culture led to a certain dissociation between the tribes and the outside world. There's evidence that several families became incapable of dealing with the rest of the world *except* through the anchormen, and there are descriptions of warriors from these families engaging in battle – usually with the European settlers, but often with each other – while in a distracted, trance-like state of their own.

Battle had become an experience which later generations would call *virtual*, the final outcome decided by the anchormen rather than by the number of dead and wounded on the field. It wasn't unknown for warriors of a tribe to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of an enemy, only to be informed by the anchormen that on *some* incomprehensible level they were actually the greatest and most successful tribe in the world.

The original anchormen were extinct by 1900, but perhaps inevitably their traditions were continued by other human and human-related cultures well beyond that date. The Remote of later centuries relied on anchormen of their own to "keep their world-view in place": while the Broken Remote of the human colonial period, arguable the most degenerate of all Remote societies, held their own anchormen in such high esteem that every word they spoke was accepted as being literally true even when the signals being channelled were entirely meaningless.

APPORTATION [*House Military: Terminology*] Originally the term used to describe the appearance of real objects from nowhere during seances, the word predates Charles Fort's coinage of "teleportation" in 1931. In the War Era, apportation is a tactic whereby duplicate appearances of objects or people are used to disturb the timeline in order to either enhance or reduce the probability of a particular outcome.

One example is the case of Elisabeth Canning, whose mysterious disappearance set all England in an uproar in 1753, just one year after the first full contact between humanity and the War Era powers. The chief suspect in the disappearance – a hideously deformed and hence instantly recognisable gypsy named Mary Squires – was, according to thirty-six sworn affidavits from respectable citizens, in Dorset on the day in question (and thus innocent) while a further twenty-seven at Enfield alone swore she was also in London in the vicinity of the house of the procuress Mother Wells, where Elisabeth had allegedly been taken (and hence guilty). Though Squires herself was condemned to death for the crime, thanks to the problematic witness accounts she was later pardoned and Elisabeth Canning was banished to New England for perjury, though not before Mother Wells was branded on the hand for her part in events.

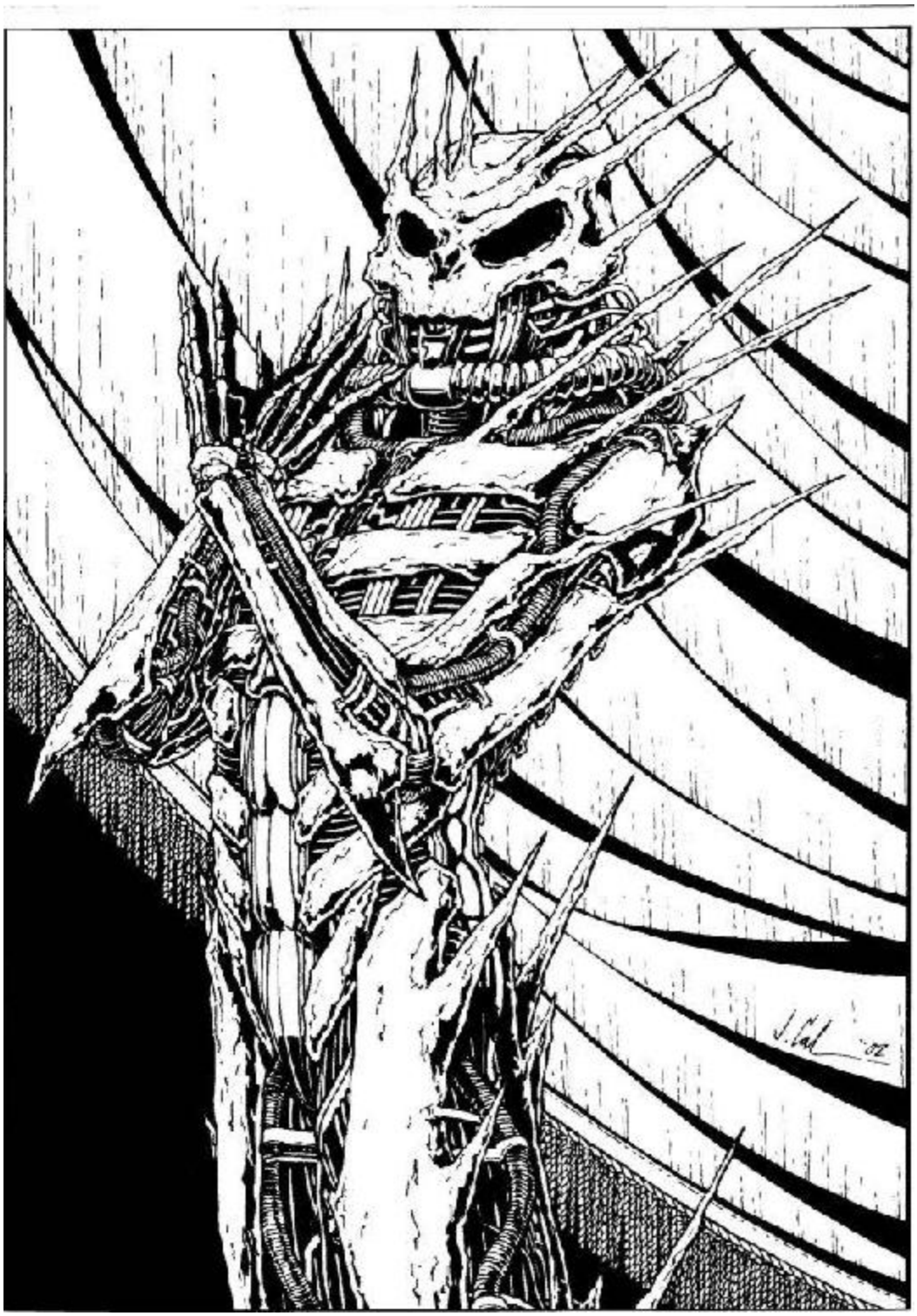
This particular apportation, engineered by a process of time-thickening and orchestrated by the Fourth Wave strategist Robert Scarratt, so muddied the waters of what was originally a rather sordid kidnapping – with a routine, if unpleasant, sexual motive – that it has to be considered not only an exploratory investigation by the House Military but an actual *attack*. 1753 was a "crucible point" in local history, a time when the pact between Britain and Faction Paradox had only recently been signed, when local culture was on the verge of becoming time-aware and local powerblocs were making a string of significant alliances. And here in the Canning case are the same themes of *inexplicable kidnapping* and *harm by strangers* which would haunt human culture for much of the later industrial era, as if a deliberate faultline in the culture's mass psyche was being prepared. The case even seems to have been chosen for its connotations of the War itself (it's notable that the incident occurred at the *House* of Mother *Wells*, suggesting time-travel at least in retrospect).

The suggestion is that in a War of cultural camouflage, local society was being primed to have a specific blind-spot: to experience an anxious, atavistic response to any future War-related matters, clouding potential House operations. It's even feasible that Scarratt was creating his own "secret escape routes" through human culture, exploiting them for his own purposes later on. It's certainly consistent with what's known about his tactics. [For more on Scarratt's ideas about sexual and gender manipulation, see Women (Dressing Up As).]

ARMOUR *(FACTION PARADOX)* [*Faction Paradox*: *Culture/Technology*] The most famous and obvious "fetish" of Faction Paradox, the Faction's ceremonial armour (occasionally worn in battle, but *always* worn at any diplomatic conventions to which the Faction might be invited) is part weapon, part carnival costume, and as a result it's never been quite clear how effective it is in combat or to what extent it's designed for show. Certainly the Faction's agents seem to believe that the power of the armour is mostly *totemic*, although many would argue that it's principally designed to irritate the Great Houses.

The most obvious point about the average suit of armour is that it appears to be made out of a skeleton, and this is indeed the case, though the question of *what* skeleton is a difficult one. The bones' "donors" would seem to have been around two metres tall, apparently hominid in shape and yet (judging by their bloated, almost bat-like skulls) somehow bestial or even mutated. The Faction's own claim is that the suits are made from the bones of Great House agents, but Great House agents contaminated by the mutagenic biomass of the Yssgaroth. As very few House agents are thought to have come into direct contact with the Yssgaroth during the first great War in Heaven, the implication is obvious. These bones were taken from another timeline, one in which the Houses *lost* their war and the Yssgaroth engulfed their species. Thus, the Faction's ceremonial dress is an insult not only to the Homeworld but to causality itself. The armour simply doesn't belong in this universe.

(There are discrepancies in this story, however. Although it's true that the spawn of the Yssgaroth – the Mal'akh – are linked to legends of "giants", Faction Paradox's own chief researcher into the Yssgaroth has spotted inconsistencies. Furthermore, though the ruling Houses *do* see the Faction's armour as an offence to their dignity they also deny the existence of other timelines altogether. As all the bones used to make the armour come from a single source – an "abomination's graveyard" at an unspecified location, thought to have been discovered bv the four lieutenants of the Grandfather of House Paradox – their origin remains unclear, but it's frequently been said that such a location could only have been accessed via the Homeworld's caldera.)



[[▲ Though the ARMOUR of Faction Paradox is variable in form – inevitable, given that it can't exactly be mass-produced – all the suits have key features in common, with significant variations being found between

cliques (or cabals) rather than between individuals: most personal customisations of the armour are purely aesthetic. The suit seen here may not exactly be "average", but it contains most of the usual fixtures.]]

The armour isn't purely made up of bone, of course. The giant ribcage may surround the torso, but it's typically secured by black protective sealant. The skull is not simply hollowed out but divided into sections, the front section being a detachable faceplate. So powerful is the skull image that even those Cousins not issued with full armour carry a ceremonial mask for important occasions (such as, say, any entry into the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire), and it's possible that not all these masks are taken from the same species of giant: Cousin Belial's headpiece, for example, famously incorporated features which were almost mammoth-like. Cousins of the Military Wing stationed within the Eleven-Day Empire wear a stripped-down, lighter version of the armour which seems to be based on the remains of an altogether smaller creature (perhaps a second-generation Mal'akh?), presumably with the same totemic connections but leaving their faces free.

The very first of the armour suits is thought to have been worn by the Grandfather, and first seen during the Grandfather's second Audience of the ruling Houses. Faction lore depicts this original suit as being the ancestor of them all, incredibly stylised and with its enormous cranium entirely obscuring the Grandfather's face. Even the four original lieutenants of Faction Paradox are depicted in elaborate, oversized suits, each one with the features of a subtly different species.

***HOUSE* ARPEXIA [*Great Houses*: *Ruling House*]** Of the Great Houses, Arpexia alone retains a naive, almost touching belief in the power of reason to pierce the 'clouds of unknowing' and uncover the greater truths of the Spiral Politic. Its members regard this as obvious, self-evident and fundamental. In this respect they're perhaps the Homeworld's only scientific fundamentalists, and like all fundamentalists they're notoriously driven and humourless.

Indeed it might be more accurate to say that in a War where *everything* seems to be infinitely changeable, Arpexia alone regards "truth" as being anything other than 'something to wear, cut sharp in the current fashion' (as a notorious ex-member of House Xianthellipse once put it). Whereas House Xianthellipse took up science in the same spirit as a man might visit a theatre in a time of Puritanism – a mixture of bravado and perverse inclinations – Arpexia has retained the same level-headed approach since the very earliest records and has over the aeons invested its experiments with the air of sanctity and tradition. A side-effect of this is that in recent times Xianthellipse and Arpexia have vied on a near equal footing, the greater experience of Arpexia being tied to Pre-War ideals which House Xianthellipse has no problem subverting. In return, Arpexia remains wary of Xianthellipse's experiments in bio-diversity, perhaps remembering its own disastrous failure in the field: the unstable, psychotic babels which it was commissioned to produce during the Pre-War Era.

Nevertheless, it's to Arpexia that the Houses owe the majority of their purely technical War devices. House Arpexia maintains perhaps the greatest number of "purely experimental" timeships, and the first nechronomancers were theirs. In human terms Arpexia's ingenuity can be compared to that of Ambrose Bierce's "Ingenious Patriot", whose pockets were filled with inventions and counter-inventions and counter-counter-inventions, until the King – exasperated by this profusion, and the necessity of listening to the Patriot extol the virtues of each and every one – paid him for all of them, then had him put to death. In a War of this nature it's not uncommon to find defences deployed before the first (linear) invention of the weapons they're devised to withstand, and Arpexia's armoury, like the Patriot's pockets, must be regarded as effectively bottomless.

AUDIENCE OF THE RULING HOUSES [*Faction Paradox: Event (Pre-War Era)*] Technically the name given to *any* session in which the ruling Houses pass judgement over those in breach of the Protocols. However, the ruling Houses so rarely have to do this (in the Pre-War era most children of the Great Houses were biologically conditioned to accept the status quo, and these days the savage inter-House political process tends to deal with dissenters before an official hearing is needed) that the term "Audiences of the ruling Houses" is almost exclusively used to describe the famous Audiences attended by the founder of House Paradox.

The Grandfather of House Paradox appeared twice before the House representatives. The first was a matter of formality, to officially announce that a new bloodline was about to be founded and that new House-Foundations would be rooted into the Homeworld's reproductive matrix accordingly. Faction Paradox's later, fetishistic portraits of this scene depict the Grandfather in full Faction regalia, dressed in a shining, tailored skeleton of armour, face concealed by the macabre carnival-like headpiece. But it's doubtful that such a suit was worn at the time: it would have caused too much alarm too quickly. It's beyond doubt, however, that the infamous suit of armour *was* worn during the *second* Audience, when the Grandfather was called to answer allegations that House Paradox – which had, at the time, only a handful of members "borrowed" from other dissenting bloodlines – was carrying out experiments into alter-time structures, in clear breach of the Protocols.

The skeletal frame of the suit, polished, morbid and majestic, was an affront to the other Houses on so many different levels. It suggested violent death at a time when violent death was virtually unknown, but more importantly it suggested the *deliberately unthinkable*. Its substance was clearly tainted by the Yssgaroth, a relic of the first great War in Heaven, an offence to the ruling Houses by its very existence. At best it was a message of defiance, at worst a thinly-veiled threat. Even the origin of the armour must have bemused them, though all the accounts suggest that House Paradox could only have acquired it by accessing the heart of the Homeworld's caldera.

And yet… and yet the Grandfather walked free from the Audience. Many versions of the story imply that the Grandfather did or said something which left the ruling Houses mesmerised, but in truth it's doubtful that the founder even had to say a word. With the new War still four-hundred years away, the fact is that the ruling Houses had no real procedure for dealing with dissent. There had never been actual *law* within House society; as such: the reproductive systems made sure the Houses never produced criminals, although it's possible that impurities in those systems created errants like Grandfather Paradox and the head of the Imperator Presidency in the first place. There'd obviously been occasional deviations before, or the previous Audiences would never have been necessary, but the ruling Houses were bound by tradition and there was no "legal" precedent for dealing with those who pushed the Protocols to breaking point.

Presented with the Grandfather, and faced with this mask of casual, impertinent death… what could the ruling Houses do? How could they possibly know how to react? It's easy to imagine them staring in appalled silence at the figure who stood before them, unable to accuse, unable to adapt, forced to acknowledge that there was no clause in the Protocols which might cover an unprecedented thing like death-fetishism. The Grandfather had been summoned to account for House Paradox's behaviour, but the Audience had to accept that no accounting would be done.

Indeed, House Paradox wouldn't be brought to "justice" for many years, and by that time the Homeworld would be a very different place.

BABELS [*Great Houses: Engineered Participants (Pre-War Era)*] For the most part, in the Pre-War era the only line of defence the Homeworld had against invasion – or, worse yet, *cultural imperialism* – were the casts. Hollow, insubstantial things, linked to the Homeworld's noosphere and having no will of their own, the casts' only real function was to defend the Homeworld's culture in a very literal sense. As the noosphere of the Homeworld exists at the very centre of constructed history, it forms a cultural "motherlode" not just for the Houses but for the entire framework of causality, and if it were attacked then the Houses' protocols, their collective memory, even their language could be eradicated in the first blow. Yet the casts were little more than puppets of baryonic matter, and as the War eventually-proved, once their link to the Homeworld was severed, they were of no use whatsoever.

But the shortcomings of the casts hadn't gone unnoticed. Long before the outbreak of the War, there was a covert attempt to modify them into something more useful in the event of a conflict with the outside universe. It isn't entirely clear who sponsored the experiment but its portentous and modernistic code name, the *Catherion Imprimiture*, suggests the megalomaniac imagination of the Imperator Presidency. Besides which, it's doubtful that anybody else would have even considered the possibility of the rest of the universe posing a serious threat. The aim of the experiment was to breed a new generation of casts, or *babels*, which would defend the Homeworld's noosphere against physical or language-viral attacks and co-ordinate cast activity independently of the Houses. Above all the babels would be sentient, their intelligences hardwired not into the abstract machinery of Homeworld culture but directly into the brains of one or more time-active agents.

A breeding-engine was symbolically purchased from House Catherion, which – its bloodline long extinct, its chapterhouse maintained only by a caretaker-line – had no further need of it. The (purely symbolic) price was three birds' eggs, a plot of land previously dedicated to the flying of ceremonial flags on state occasions, and a small, immaculately-crafted pocket-watch made by a Mr. Harrison of Yorkshire, England, c. 1765. The "receipt" is the only surviving documentation of the Catherion Imprimiture or of the babels. There are few hard facts available about the

actual experiments, and perhaps posterity should be thankful. The modifications made to the breeding-engine, the ends to which it was turned, can only have been grisly and horrific.

This much is known: the babels were grown within the first fifty years of the Imprimiture. It isn't clear how many there were, although probably no more than eight. Only three have ever been identified by reliable sources. But it is clear that many, if not all, of these creatures were incurably insane. The babel which escaped, and became responsible for the near legendary massacre at House Catherion, certainly was.

Very little of the information that exists on the Catherion massacre can be considered solid fact, but one thing is beyond doubt: the alleged slaughter coincided with the inexplicable disappearance of Mr. Harrison's timepiece from the Homeworld. It's proved untraceable since then, even in its component parts, perhaps a symbol that the Houses had washed their hands of the Catherion Imprimiture … or simply that the project had "run out of time". The babels became nothing more than an obscure and unpleasant part of history, and weren't heard of again until the beginning of the War, when circumstances had changed to such a degree that the ruling Houses were once again willing to consider their activation.

***COUSIN* BELIAL [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Earth, C21/Earth, C18-19)*]** According to the birth records at the Pine Ridge Reservation hospital, William Crow Dog was born around ten in the morning on the 6th of June, 2001, to Melissa Burke and Richard Crow Dog. Both parents were active in the American-Indian tribal council and encouraged academic achievement. William was also born in late spring or early summer of 1782 to an Oglala Sioux woman named Pretty Shield, and her husband Bull Head.

The twenty-first century Billy Crow Dog was one term short of completing a Bachelor's degree in theosophy when he was arrested for stabbing a woman to death in a bar fight. Until this incident he'd been a first-rate pupil, fluent in several native American dialects, well-liked by both students and faculty. None of them were more shocked by his arrest and imprisonment for manslaughter than his advisor at South Dakota State University, Alice Lugosi:

'Billy didn't drink alcohol. Ever. He was practically prohibitionist about it. I can't even imagine him in a bar let alone killing someone in a bar fight. It was like he was *trying* to go to prison.'

A telling statement. It was in the Dupree County Correctional Facility that Pierre La Pierre, a Wichita man serving time for rape, introduced him to the Path of the Black Medicine. And it was the Black Medicine Path that led Billy Crow Dog to Faction Paradox: literally appearing in the middle of a ritual being performed by the Faction's Sabakash cell in the basement of an abandoned Moose Lodge in Negaunee, Michigan. Sabakash were so named after one of the massive tusked creatures whose bones they favoured for use in their ritual armour. Billy Crow Dog may have found the group appealing for its name alone, as it was similar to the Caddo word for the Sioux, *Tsaba'kosh*, or "cut-throats". He was disappointed to discover that the Caddo word was a misnomer, however, and made the observation in his travel journal: 'Well, there's another cherished assumption squashed all to hell. Seems the gesture for beheading is the same as the gesture for the necklaces the Sioux make and trade with the Caddo for bags of pumpkin seeds. Have seen no evidence of the practice of beheading at all. Pumpkin seeds roasted over a camp fire are delicious.'

With the aid of rituals culled from native American techniques and freely mingled with those of Faction Paradox, he was born for the second time (some may argue it was actually the *first*) to Pretty Shield in 1782, penetrating an era in history otherwise inaccessible to the War Era powers. He claimed to enjoy this second childhood much more than his first, whilst retaining full knowledge of his mission as ground-level observer of Remote troops among the North American warrior tribes. His status as a nineteenth century Sioux warrior enabled him to escape detection by agents of the Great Houses, but it was his life as a twenty-first century reservation Indian which informed his understanding of where critical early-nineteenth century war strategies against the whites would fail and how to counter the religious doctrines being introduced to the warrior societies by the Houses.

Cousin Belial's journals contain extensive notes on many of the more fetishistic practices of the nineteenth century, from Catch-the-Bear's war bonnet to the peyote dream runners, and the texts have been published and "unpublished" countless times. There's one copy at the University of South Dakota that's been rediscovered by historians in both the computer archives and the library's stacks at least twenty-seven times to date. [For picture, see Appendix II.]

BESHIELACH [*Lesser Species***: *Engineered Participants/Locations*]** Race of sentient planetesimals engineered as a weapon (at the behest of the Great Houses) during the early stages of the War. The finished product didn't quite live up to the design schematics, however, the Beshielach making better diplomats than weapons. The Beshielach hive based in the Greater Autrobulan Cluster was instrumental in negotiating the surrender of the native Autrobulan authorities, who had been largely co-opted by the *Well now. Sorry to interrupt this enthralling history lesson, but I just thought I'd comment on what a ridiculous pack of lies it is. I'm sorry. I haven't introduced myself. Here you are, hoping to get some insight into the beshielach (no, they don't deserve to be capitalised, bureaucratic chunks of rock with no ambition of their own don't get the "B") and I have to go and insert myself into that delightfully vacant frontal lobe of yours. Or at least, into the memetic connections thereof.*

But I digress. Quite a lot, actually. Some sentients use sound waves to communicate, I use digressions. I'm sorry, this might be too distracting for an opening gambit, mightn't it? Oh, I know. Go and look up ***Shift****… well, look at that, it came up in bold-face. Go and look up* ***Shift****. I'll be here when you get back, I promise.*

Now, there was a time when I used sound. A memory of which era I've only recently been able to access.

I remember being a physical, tangible presence, having mass and inertia and a body (such as it was) to call my own and, oh, lots of other things. I remember life as a liquid process, experience dripping one drop at a time into the me-pool, and I remember the packet of powder they poured into me to get me involved in this War. Instant Time Soldier, Just Add Biomass. And obviously I'm exaggerating, obviously the process was ever-so-slightly more complex, but that's how casually the Great Houses and their lap-dogs overwrote who I was and brought me into the War as an agent at ground level. That's how I ended up in the freezing cold in the middle of the warzone and took my first steps towards becoming who I am today.

I still hate the cold. I'm non-corporeal, and I hate the cold. I mean, we were liquid-protean bio-forms, and the first battle we got sent to was in an ice-field on one of the Simia worlds. What kind of stupid planning is that? All

their "defensive temporally-active biodata" isn't worth a thing when the enemy works out a quick and easy way to sabotage the thermal locks on your skin-suit.

I sense you getting itchy. Shall we go back to the asteroids, then? Would you rather hear how the Autrobulan hive stepped up its campaign (although "evangelism" or "sales pitch" might be better terms to use in this instance)? Fair enough.

The explosion didn't destroy the coalesced hive, however, but spread the Beshielach throughout the local star system. While most of the Beshielach were pulled into the local suns or (slowly) flung out into deep space, a significant portion were drawn into the gravity well of the largest planet in the system, a brown dwarf where the Autrobulus hive soon *I trust I've made my point. Believe me, when they start talking about the inherent difficulties of* Dating War Era Events *you'll be glad I'm here to break up the monotony.*

Was that another link?

BIODATA [*Terminology*] The "substance" common to all conscious entities which defines an individual's place in space-time and dictates the relationship between that individual and the rest of history. Describing biodata is difficult, as a full understanding seems to require an inherent grasp of time-active modelling only native to the Great Houses, but perhaps the best *simple* definition is R. B. Nevitz's description of biodata as "time DNA". In the same way that DNA shapes an individual's genetic form, biodata shapes an individual's course through the continuum, and can be regarded as a strand of information running through all four mundane dimensions: the shape of the biodata strand, as the individual moves along his or her own timeline, is the *true* shape of that individual's life.

(DNA is a good comparison, as the biodata contains a complete physical profile of the subject as well as the subject's relationship to the continuum-in-general. It's also been suggested that biodata *evolves* in some way, with the biodata of the major powers influencing the biodata of lesser species… in which case, the diaspora which first spread members of the Houses throughout the Spiral Politic must have had the same impact on the landscape of time that mankind's prehistoric exodus from Africa had on the landscape of Earth.)

Therefore, as Nevitz rightly concluded, if you know how to read an individual's biodata strand then you can read that individual's entire history from every facet of his or her past to every moment of his or her future. Yet Nevitz believed that doing such a thing was a virtual impossibility, and only used the idea of biodata as a philosophical model. The Great Houses *do* know how to read biodata, but the procedures are difficult and require an extensive use of technology. Also, like most species the Houses are linear in nature – they move through time in one direction, from past to future – which means that House agents have far less difficulty reading *past* biodata than *future* biodata, making future prediction something of an inexact science. Nonetheless, a great deal of importance is attached to biodata by the Houses, and at least one theory of War-era technology suggests that biodata is a vital element of the Houses' timeships [see Time-Travel: Biodata Principle].

“Biodata” is a human term, first coined by Nevitz in 1958, and reflects the theorist’s own mistaken belief that only biological intelligences would have their own biodata strands. He rightly concluded that in quantum terms, only minds capable of true comprehension (that is, only minds capable of collapsing probability-states and thus making sense out of the subatomic chaos of the universe) would be biodata-dependent, but he was wrong in supposing that only organic, analogue consciousnesses are capable of this kind of comprehension. In fact the majority of artificial intelligences also seem to be connected to biodata strands, as are a vast number of less self-aware animal species. It’s now known that the first artificial intelligence on Earth to have a biodata strand of its own, albeit a small one, was the analytical engine not-quite-perfected by Charles Babbage in 1834.

***THE* BOOK OF ENOCH [*Lesser Species*: *Text (Earth, Ancient History)*]**
One of the books removed from Biblical canon in the fourth century AD (on the rather spurious grounds that it was "too old" to be relevant) and suppressed for centuries due to the nature of its contents, containing as it did an expanded account of the peculiar passages in the Book of Genesis regarding the mating of angels and humans. In fact this book, and the related text known as the Book of Noah, contain references to a race whose offspring became giants, *'[who are] produced from the spirits and the flesh, who shall be called evil spirits upon the earth… the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack do battle and work destruction… they eat no food, but nevertheless hunger and thirst'* (Enoch, Ch. 15). Also, *'when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind… and to devour one another's flesh and drink the blood'* (Enoch, Ch. 7).

Brought to the western world from Ethiopia in 1773, the book wasn't translated into English until 1821 but seems to have quickly established itself at the heart of gothic horror literature as the field grew. The expanded story of a War in Heaven and the Fall of Angels wasn't new, although its links to the vampiric legends of Europe and the Middle East certainly were. Writers and scholars were quick to notice the obvious similarities between the story of the "watcher" angels' fall from grace and the Christian myth of the Fall of Lucifer and the rebel thrones from Heaven.

Stripped of the fanciful language of religion, the story is a simple one. A race known as the *anakim* or "watchers", highly advanced and civilised, have among their number many who wish to interfere in worldly affairs instead of sitting idly by and merely observing. Led by Azazel (or Shemjaza in some versions), two-hundred of these rebels descend from "the high place" and live among the people, passing on their knowledge and taking wives from the mortals' numbers. However, their offspring are monsters: giants who have to be ripped from the womb, who have a terrible hunger for flesh and blood and who cannot be stopped. As a result the watchers fight the rebels, who are captured and exiled: their leader bound headfirst over the abyss for all eternity, hanging by one leg.

The book is considered to hold the seeds of a story regarding the origin of the Mal'akh, a breed of cannibalistic predator known to have had links with humanity for at least six-thousand years. The Mal'akh's origins have always been a mystery, but since the rise of Faction Paradox (and the rather unfortunate confusion surrounding the faction's skeletal hybrid armour) links between the Great Houses and the Mal'akh have begun to appear as scholars from all sides are given access to data which reveals more and more about this race. Probably the most notable theorist in this field was/is the former explorer Richard Francis Burton, whose conclusions on the Mal'akh have been unpopular with just about everybody.

“BRIEFINGS” [*House Military: Culture/Technology*] A standard Great House procedure for indoctrinating recruits from the lesser species, the retro implanted, biologically-fitted “briefings” give prospective soldiers basic background information about the Great Houses and their rivals, plus a strenuous reiteration that the soldiers’ actions are absolutely and unequivocally necessary if anything resembling normal life is to continue. Critics have suggested that this amounts to nothing more than brainwashing, but a staunch defence for the process is available, although reiterating it here would be a waste of time. The briefings are absolutely and unequivocally necessary if anything resembling normal life is to continue. *And if you believe that then I’ve got an invisible hyperspatial bridge I’d like to sell you… sorry, I’m not supposed to be in this entry* [see also **Shift**]. Indeed, much of the information on the War available to humanity originates from “briefed” agents.

The briefing process isn’t easily shrugged off. After a few early problems with Celestis infiltrators the Great Houses developed briefings which prevented any other power from usurping their personnel, whereby any thought of receiving a Celestis Mark of Indenture – or even *sympathising* with another power – incited a catastrophic psychological breakdown in the soldier, resulting in self-obliteration. Many advanced regen-inf troops are fitted with physical as well as psychological self-destruct protocols, but perhaps more alarming is the fact that several of the troops who carry these protocols have, in the process of regenerating their own injured bodies, begun to take on what appear to be externalised physical responses to the conditioning: open wound stigmata, death’s-head faces imprinted on the skin, or in one documented case a large, red, button-like spot, surrounded by cursive scarring as if to say, “do not push”.

***THE* BROKEN REMOTE [*Remote: Group (War Era)*]** When Faction Paradox first created the Remote, by hardwiring its human subjects into their own rapid-signal media systems, it did so for one principal reason: that if the Remote could process a seemingly limitless number of information-channels simultaneously, then the Great Houses would be unable to predict the actions, ideas and cultural developments of the race in any way. What nobody predicted was that this strategy would be used *against* the Remote by the Great Houses themselves, chiefly on the fixed Remote colony (one of only two) on Fallahal.

The Faction's belief was that as the Great Houses were culturally sterile, they'd be entirely unprepared for the Remote's assaults. And yet this conclusion was reached before the Homeworld launched its Fourth Wave, by which time certain military units had become familiar with the ideas of the lesser species and ready to consider a more *cultural* kind of crusade. The House Military's Second Wave had spent vast amounts of time and matter on the eradication of Remote colonies, erasing entire worlds if they believed the Faction's shock troops to have had any presence there, but during the Fourth Wave more subtle measures suddenly became possible.

The Houses knew full well that if the newly-discovered Remote on Fallahal were left to prosper then they'd become subversive elements in local space-time, their spontaneous, pro-active media systems inspiring them to burn their way through any number of House interests in the region. And whereas the Second Wave would have razed the very surface of Fallahal (at no little expense to causality), the Fourth Wave instead planted agents on the colony specifically trained to infiltrate the media-system, "hacking into" local culture in order to slow, or even halt, the Remote's progress. Even by the standards of the crusade against the Remote, it was a devastatingly successful campaign. The Remote have failed to move from the biosphere of Fallahal in over twenty years: trapped in a web of degenerative media, media which *rewards* them for inaction, it's now unlikely that they'll ever play any real part in the War proper.

The term *Broken Remote* is now used to refer to any Remote colony which has become so bogged down by repetitious, self-involved media signals that it becomes more or less impotent, and those House Military units which

anticipate hostile Remote action generally carry datacoils of the Fallahal signals – most notably the Jallama Reed transmissions and the New Young Gods project – in the hope of holding back hostile troops. The term is also occasionally used to describe the *other* static Remote colony of the early War Era, a small and largely insignificant outpost now only remembered by history for spawning the legendary terrorist, crossbreed and "mother of timeships" known as Compassion.

***MICHAEL* BROOKHAVEN (A.K.A. COUSIN GABLE, 1945? – 1999?)**
[*Remote: Participant (Earth, C20)*] It's impossible to ascertain anything about Michael Brookhaven's early life: he edited his own past too often. Chiefly remembered as the "Emperor of Excesses", in 1977 he was recruited by the Hollywood cabal of Faction Paradox, a group which by that stage was only tenuously linked to the main body of the Faction and whose methodology owed more to the golden age of Los Angeles excess-culture than to the Faction's methods. By the mid-1970s the cell had very little direct influence on the North American media, keeping an obsessive watch on the entertainment industry without involving itself in the production process, the only exceptions being the maintenance of several routine Production Hell projects and the ownership of a number of contracts for performers deliberately held in "limbo". The cabal certainly had contacts within Hollywood society, although there was little or no sense of loyalty, with the group only gaining new friends through narcotic bribery, the *bargain of the mask* [see under Faction Hollywood] and, in one famous case, organised prostitution. From 1975 onwards many in the cabal were beginning to feel that cinema was a spent force, and with the video age fast approaching there was even a half-hearted effort to push parts of the industry towards a more fetishistic form of sell-through pornography, the theory being that the era demanded an emphasis on the erotic (rather than the pure-military) aspects of Faction and Remote culture. This wasn't an age for consumer warfare, especially not with America reeling from Vietnam and the new sexual liberalism creeping onto cinema screens.

▲ *MICHAEL BROOKHAVEN.*

Brookhaven changed all this. Though he took the name Cousin Gable at his confirmation, and – not without humour – referred to both his own "bloodline" and his estate at Newport Beach as the House of the Seven Gables, he continued to use his given name in his dealings with the outside

world: though as Chad Vandemeer noted, it was Brookhaven who raised the traditional LA pastime of ignoring the outside world to an art form. While Faction Paradox proper considered the Hollywood cell to be a minor resource, a possible mill for recruitment but too unpredictable and (perhaps too obvious) to be a significant powerbase, Brookhaven understood the power of *absolute spectacle*. Within two years he was leading the Californian group, and probably the most influential member never to rise above the level of Cousin.

He was a wildly successful recruiter, with great personal charm and an innate understanding of what would lure the aristocracy of the entertainment business into the cabal. Why risk plastic surgery and scarring, he asked, when you can have your biodata re-processed? Why spend effort and money to cover up a scandal that'll probably still end up leaking to the press, when you can just cut the scandal out of causality? Even apart from his work in the development of the hollow spectaculars, it was chiefly Brookhaven who re-introduced Beverly Hills society to the delights of identity-surgery not seen in Californian circles since the days of the "mondo" self-mutilationist clubs of the 1950s. While it's tempting to look at the history of American cinema and guess which "wild" names were friends of the Hollywood cabal, it'd be more telling to look at those who remained unblemished despite their constant exposure to the local lifestyle, those who stayed scar-free in the popular imagination if not in fact. These were Brookhaven's successes, the cornerstones in his peer group of actors, players, agents and suppliers: Brookhaven's Follies.

And as Brookhaven's influence grew, so did his own private interests. Inevitably he spread his cell's influence into the relative past, although he himself saw this is a minor re-editing process rather than a serious infringement of causality, running so much of his empire from his Cutting Room/shrine at Newport Beach that linear time became a virtual irrelevance. So when, for example, market research proved that the upcoming film *The Long Coolth Of Summer* (1985, not one of Brookhaven's own projects) was destined to fail at the box office, Brookhaven "spliced" the script into 1953 in return for a favour from Linecross Distribution and was able to have it produced there in modest black-and-white. The modern film instantly became a remake with built-in name recognition, and went on to be a bankable success. A similar act brutally sacrificed the

reputations of everyone involved with the original 1998 murder-thriller *Mason Hotel* in order to provide the overworked Alfred Hitchcock with a near-finished shooting script in 1962.

Brookhaven's philosophy, or at least his claimed philosophy, was that if films didn't present an accurate and consistent representation of history then the populace would begin to believe there was no consistent history. While film-makers hardly needed suprahuman input to achieve inconstancy, his perfectionism led to such minor amusements as *Frozen Moments* (in which the admittedly unusual life of the scientific theorist R. B. Nevitz became a tragic, epic love story set against the backdrop of the Cold War) and *The Silver Mountain* (a sanitised-yet-histrionic biography of English explorer Richard Burton, which happily blurred the line between the adventurer and the other, more cinematic, Richard Burton). Although in theory this process was aimed at increasing the population's receptivity to the methodology of Faction Paradox, by the mid-1980s Brookhaven was already showing signs of attempting to re-cast history purely for his own satisfaction, and – tellingly – for the satisfaction of his army of supporters. It's hard to avoid the suspicion that this was, always, the point.

Cut off from the rest of the world by the in-crowd of California, and holding seemingly endless parties inside a "members only" compound guarded by *loa* reportedly modelled on the sphinxes of De Mille's *Ten Commandments*[1], Brookhaven's cabal seemed more concerned with re-making the western world in its own image than with paving the way for a Faction recruitment programme. Brookhaven styled himself as a media-age Caligula, creating atrocities against the past using the studio system as his instrument, always playing up to the audience's desires in order to keep himself in the position of Emperor. 1992's *Independent Hearts* re-wrote the American War of the Revolution to cast the British General Howe as a war criminal rather than a man of principle, the movie opening with an establishing scene of mass slaughter in which Howe's army commits atrocities against colonial families which border on cannibalism. Brookhaven's (private) claim that these sequences were inspired by the House Military's genocides against the Remote is dubious to say the least, a desperate attempt to justify his efforts to his supposed superiors in Faction Paradox.

The truth is that by the 1990s contact between Faction Hollywood and Faction Paradox was virtually non-existent, the lines of communication severed by the same crises which had separated the Faction from the Remote. As Faction Hollywood's members were exclusively human and in many cases augmented by War-time cosmetic surgical technology, it wouldn't be untrue to say that the cell had become a Remote group in itself, aggressive, carnivorous and self-reliant. The result was an investigation by the House Military, headed by their agent Christopher Rodonanté Cwej, Brookhaven was removed from the world entirely during the Hollywood Bowl shooting of 1999, his disappearance in the last months of the 1900s prompting *Variety* to refer to him as *"the* Twentieth-Century Fox". Faction Hollywood is not expected to prosper in his absence.

Brookhaven: A Filmography

1953: *The Long Coolth of Summer* (supervising producer, uncredited).

1962: *Mason Hotel* (supervising producer, uncredited).

1977: *Chatelaine* (associate producer).

1978: *Some Kind of Afterworld (US release Some Kind of Heaven, producer).*

1980: *Jodie's Law* (associate producer, co-writer).

1981: *1774* (co-writer, uncredited).

1982: *Mr. Harrison's Angels* (supervising producer).

1984: *The Dead Travel Fast* (producer, cameo appearance).

1985: *The Long Coolth of Summer* ("remake", supervising producer, uncredited).

1986: *Walking in Adéquat* (associate producer, French/US co-production).

1987: *The Dead Travel Fast Part Two* (producer, arguable cameo appearance), *Frozen Moments* (producer/director, as Steven Cabell).

1989: *The Silver Mountain* (executive producer, co-writer).

1990: *The Coyote Road* (supervising producer, “technical adviser”).

1992: *Independent Souls* (executive producer, co-writer as Steven Cabell).

1993: *Percy Shelley’s Prince of Blood (US release Percy Shelley’s The Bloody Prince, producer).*

1995: *Kingdom of Beasts* (remake, co-writer, uncredited).

1997: *Through the Eye of Eternity: First Sight* (video release/TV tie-in, executive producer).

1998: *Mason Hotel* (“remake”, supervising producer, uncredited).

1999: *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom* (writer/director/producer).

BROOKHAVEN'S FOLLIES [*Remote. Group (Earth, C20)*] Name commonly given by the industry press to the "court" held by Michael Brookhaven at Los Angeles, which from 1977 to 1999 made up the core of the Faction Hollywood cabal. Although the name "Follies" is most often used to refer to the more visible and well-known members of Brookhaven's circle, as in any imperial court the elite of the West Coast Empire were surrounded by several ranks of agents, gofers, financiers and high society contacts, not to mention a small army of individuals whose sole purpose was to be attractive. The orgiastic practices of Faction Hollywood during the 1980s required a special kind of follower, and in many cases Californian wannabes – almost exclusively male – were happy to submit to identity-surgery in order to become *presences* in Hollywood circles, ideal, perfectly-balanced, super-sensitive sexual partners for the new executive class. And if these techniques shortened the lifespans of the subjects, encouraging terminal femto-cell retardation by the age of thirty or the possibility of fading from causality altogether by becoming the walking dead, then, well, that was just LA. Dying young and vanishing from memory were natural hazards of the environment.

And more than one star, fearing that his or her own place in history might be at risk, made a fast and deliberate exit from the world under Brookhaven's supervision. He was a master of deliberately blurring the line between immortality and *literal* immortality. Although rumours abound in the more knowledgeable LA circles that several "names" faked their own deaths and ran off to join one or other of the War-time factions, this is highly doubtful, as by Brookhaven's heyday the Faction's Cult of Celebrity Death had fallen out of favour and none of the other major powers were risking the recruitment of "name" agents. Instead, all the evidence suggests that Brookhaven practised a form of ritualism which owed something to the act by which the Grandfather of House Paradox was originally removed from history. If any of his pet projects actually *died* then their deaths were purely a matter of convenience. The cream of the Follies became *loa*, presences every bit as tangible, if invisible, as those attached to the Eleven-Day Empire. For Sam Kneuppe's neo-western *The Coyote Road* (1990), Brookhaven wired the entire movie into the causal nexus of the era in which it was set, not only summoning and binding the *Zeitgeist* of the

nineteenth century into the film but also leading to widescreen religious visions among the natives of the 1800s.

The studio system has always been superstitious by its very nature, so it's not surprising that several of Brookhaven's techniques became industry standards after his first decade in Hollywood. By the early 1990s it was well-known even *outside* the cabal that a clique of four leading figures in the film establishment were practising small-scale ritual, calling on Cousin Gable's *loa* in a typically neo-spiritualist form. The favoured procedure was to mark out the ritual circle in cocaine, which the ritualist-executive would then imbibe (it's often said that the rite would only work if all traces of the substance were ingested in a single snort, probably just another local superstition) to allow the *loa*'s presence to infiltrate the charged, hyperactive sections of the subject's brain. The most notorious use of this technique took place during a charity screening at Monhegan Hall in 1994, when – not unnoticed by the industry press – over a dozen male executives assembled in the men's room of the cinema to watch Howard de Marco kneel on the floor and ingest a "mystic circle" With a circumference of nearly a metre.

Ironically in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, when computer-generated versions of deceased actors began to appear in new productions, Faction Hollywood's human clients recouped considerable sums by enlisting *loa*-immortals to play themselves from within the "prayer wheels" of the studio mainframes. By this point Brookhaven had been removed from the world altogether following his encounter with Christopher Rodonanté Cwej, but his work once again had set new standards in the business.

BURLESQUE DEVICES [*House Military: Culture/Technology*] The usage of "vulgar" real-world technologies, of nanites and anti-nanites, of drones, of sheaves, of stars themselves, represents a retrograde element in the House Military. When most results can be achieved by twists of biodata or of the continuual strata themselves, a reliance on artefacts which can be seen, touched, or (most tellingly in the case of nanites) *ingested* suggests what Freud might have considered a thoroughly obsessive and repressed approach to warfare. But by recognising the essentially comforting aspect of most vulgar War-technology, the House Military commander Robert Scarratt is considered the first commander to have equipped agents in the field with devices which had no real functionality at all, except to enhance the *fetishitic aura* of the bearer.

One of the first strategists to consider the value of sexuality, an area which remains rather clouded to most of the House Military, Scarratt noted: 'The single greatest advantage to our rejection of organic reproduction is that, like the Victorians, we have raised generations to whom an ankle is a potent source of organic energies (…) and to whom, again like the Victorians, almost any act or item can be imbued with the significance which evolution has granted to reproductive cues.' His *burlesque devices*, from so-called D-Mat weapons to the primary hull torso designs of the later 103-form time-ships, brought what he called 'the values of the music-hall to the theatre of war'.

It's unclear whether he was entirely serious, but it is certain that his agents, and his troops, successfully jangled and posed their way through engagements and entrapments which were lethal to troops expected to rely on internalised metatechnologies. As far as is known, Scarratt's forces are the only followers of the Great Houses who still insist on using (and breeding) the much-mocked "autonomic killerbots" from the early years of the War.

CAPTAIN SIR RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON (1821 – "1890") [Faction Paradox: Participant (Earth. C19/Present)]

'I ask myself "why?" And the only echo is "damned fool!".'

One of the more controversial figures of the mid-1800s, Richard Burton was best known for being the co-discoverer of the source of the Congo, Lake Tanganyika; for his long-running feud with his co-adventurer John Hanning Speke over the location of the source of the Nile; and for his rather too literal (for Victorian tastes, at least) translations of the *Kama Sutra*, the *1001 Nights* and the *Perfumed Garden*.

A more detailed study of his biography reveals that his achievements were far more wide-ranging and phenomenal. Possessed of a vast intellect, coupled with a thirst for adventure and a complete disregard for authority, Burton's life is the stuff of high adventure. Already connected by birth to the Grand Families of the British aristocracy, Burton was recruited by the secret cabal of the Star Chamber after being sent down from Oxford University. Dispatched to Bombay in 1843, he was quickly put to work, first in acclimatising to the new land, its customs and languages, then to his new role as the Chamber's agent. He quickly found what was to be his lifelong interest in the esoteric ritual of the East.

Just as quickly he realised that his superiors in the Star Chamber were far from being his equals in such matters, and respect very soon turned to disdain. Hardly surprising, then, that while he was involved in a project to examine certain ape-like grotesques located in the area he was approached and recruited by an unknown agent of Faction Paradox. (Since no one has ever come forward to claim responsibility for this, younger Cousins have suggested that he recruited *himself*, in a particularly Burtonesque gesture. It's certainly true that Burton was the last "name" ever to be officially initiated into the organisation.) Burton's translations of various ritual-erotic texts of the east, especially as they pertained to the suspension of time and the opening of pathways, were to become foundation texts for later Faction scholars: and his ability to blend into any culture – honed by his *hajj* to Mecca and Medina, and his days in the Great Game in India – was without peer even among seasoned Cousins. Due to his talents the decision was made to leave him in the field, for the duration of his natural

life at least. Burton's contacts with the Star Chamber made him an invaluable asset, as the cult had no intention of allowing the Chamber to repeat its attack upon the Eleven-Day Empire, an attack which had led to the burning of Parliament in 1834.

But in 1845, while investigating some of the more esoteric practices taking place in the backroom of male brothels in Karachi on behalf of his superior Sir Charles Napier, Burton was forced to reveal the true level of his abilities when what should have been a simple (if exotic) investigation went tragically wrong. The incident was to cloud his career for decades. In 1857 he undertook the dangerous journey to the interior of Africa with John Speke, ostensibly to locate the source of the Nile but in reality to locate the fabled Mountains of the Moon, home to a colony of the inhuman Mal'akh. His later dispute with Speke was never resolved, as the explorer was killed in 1864 after he threatened to make public the events of the expedition.

Burton argued bitterly over the necessity of the murder of Speke, eventually challenging the assassin Byron to a duel and beating him resoundingly. A constant state of all-out war has existed between the two men ever since, Burton regarding his lordship as an 'overweight flea whose legend is even bigger than he is'. Whilst a witty raconteur and a brilliant mind, Burton's relationship with his peers within the Eleven-Day Empire is less than perfect. Never a man to pretend to like or work with those he doesn't respect, he has a tendency to give offence, although it has to be said that much of this is intentional.

Even before his recruitment, Burton was a formidable ritualist; highly skilled in the use of tantric techniques of time control; and said to be able to bi-locate at will. He's even claimed to have "walked" through time on more than one occasion. His erudite and incisive studies of both the Mal'akh and the War have proved, and still prove, of great use to the Faction even if his theories have been less than popular in certain quarters.

BYRON: GEORGE GORDON, SIXTH BARON BYRON OF ROCHDALE (1785 – "1824") [Faction Paradox: Participant (Earth, C18-19/Present)]

'Mad, bad and dangerous to know.' – Lady Caroline Lamb.

Little introduction is generally needed for this most preposterous figure in literary history. Poet, revolutionary, adventurer, rake, seducer of women and men, a man supposedly so depraved he not only bedded his own half-sister but ravished his wife on their wedding night and so disturbed her with his behaviour that she fled from his company, taking their young daughter with her. Little Ada Byron was afterwards brought up in a manner meant to ensure that she'd never, under any circumstances, emulate her father in spirit or deed. Byron spent the remainder of his life in self imposed exile abroad, eventually meeting his end in Greece, wasting away with romantic flair in 1824 fighting against the Turks with the Greek liberationists at Missolonghi. His body was pickled in brandy and shipped home to England, for a funeral procession the like of which wouldn't be seen again until the twentieth century.

The biographies are quite accurate, as far as they go, although they do overlook the real motivations of most parties. However, they get one fact quite wrong. Byron did not die in 1824.

Byron's mentor was the Earl of Carlisle, a Knight of the Garter, and at that time a representative in the "secret army" of the Star Chamber. Byron spent some considerable time with the Earl at Castle Howard, and from an early age was groomed for service to the Grand Families. In 1809, along with the Families' agents Fletcher and Hobhouse, Byron was sent on his first real mission for the Chamber. Under the pretence of making the fashionable Grand Tour of Europe, Byron, Fletcher and Hobhouse were tasked with making their way to the court of Ali Tebelen at Janina and ascertaining the truth behind certain rumours that the predatory Mal'akh were again becoming a major power in the East. Such a tour also provided an opportunity to make useful acquaintances at the courts of Europe. For the Families it was an excellent cover for their agents, in the days when communications were slow at best and at worst compromised by enemy infiltrators.

The journey passed reasonably safely until the company reached Malta, and had its first real experience of the Mal'akh themselves. The horrors of the Maltese incident took a terrible toll on Byron, who understandably felt himself to have been "set up" by the Star Chamber. But his disillusionment with the Chamber's methods, which would eventually lead to his fraternisation with Faction Paradox, wouldn't become apparent until he was forced to leave England in 1815. Byron was to spend the rest of his life an infamous exile on the continent, eventually finding himself in the company of the Shelley Cabal in Italy, at least up until the Mal'akh attack on the group in 1822.

Byron's motives for arranging his own apparent death two years later remain at best a mystery, although given his flamboyance one can't rule out a simple desire for theatricality. Besides, this was the age of the Cult of Celebrity Death. At age 36, his greatest artistic endeavours were behind him, and his notoriety was much diminished by time and distance. He could probably have slipped away without much fanfare, but that was never his style.

After stage-managing his death with Fletcher's help, and returning a suitable duplicate to England – reports that Hobhouse failed to recognise the body when it arrived back in England suggest the resemblance wasn't convincing – Byron took his place in the Eleven-Day Empire, and within days was proving to be as troublesome to Faction Paradox as he'd been to his superiors in the Star Chamber. He may have seemed an ideal recruit for the Cult of Celebrity Death, and an enthusiastic one, but his natural propensity for theatrical display and excess was never to be curbed. He remained obsessed with the Chamber, however, determined to see them pay for what he still saw as their betrayal of him on Malta. His activities on behalf of his new masters largely remain unclear, apart from his repeated attempts to contact his daughter Ada (which led in part to the infamous Clockwork Ouroboros affair of 1834) and several incidents in the 1850s and 1860s, which apparently resulted in his clash with the Faction's only other remaining "celebrity" agent, the adventurer Richard Francis Burton.

Now in his later years Byron is described as a man of average height, his hair worn collar-length and receding past the crown. His figure, always tending towards corpulence, is described as having run to fat over the

muscle. Yet for all his unimposing stature and looks, he remains a vibrant (if unorthodox) figure within the Eleven-Day Empire, at least when he can find the time to drag himself from his bed and attend the Parliament. Although technically regarded as an elder Cousin, Byron has never used any title, nor has he ever taken a *nom de guerre*: he is, uniquely, Byron. Patron of lost causes and the senseless gesture, forever the mad poet and revelling in it to the point where even the most outrageous characters within the Faction feel that he flirts with self-parody. His reputation has always proved to be an irresistible draw to younger family members, however, to whom he's become something of a lifetime in his own legend.

***ADA* BYRON *(1815 – 1852)* [*Lesser Species: Participant (Earth, C19)*]**
Trained since birth to channel her intellect into more useful areas than those of her equally talented but mercurial father Lord Byron, Ada was brought up as a mathematical prodigy on behalf of the Star Chamber, kept strictly removed from any of the degrading influence of poetry or fancy and trained to put her talents to use in the realms of the mechanical rather than the allegorical. The Chamber, an organisation dedicated to destroying the Mal'akh (among other "enemies of humanity"), recruited Ada at an early age via her mother and tried to have her unique mind put to work deciphering the hidden data of Bach's Musical Offering, a cipher which they hoped would be invaluable in their escalating conflict with Faction Paradox.

Ada was to be the Chamber's last best hope to breach the defences of the Eleven-Day Empire. But even the greatest mind can only do so much, and Ada was unsuccessful in penetrating the encrypted data of the Musical Offering, known to be the "key" to the Empire's stronghold. Yet upon seeing the tentative plans for Babbage's analytical engine she immediately grasped its potential as a route into the sub-universe of Faction Paradox, and the Chamber took the step of assigning her to Babbage's coterie, in the hopes of harnessing their respective talents.

What the Chamber couldn't have known was that Ada Byron had for some time been followed by a somewhat mysterious figure: *'an angel or a devil watches over me, I know not which,'* as she wrote in her journal. The evening before the Chamber's planned assault on the Eleven-Day Empire, the figure limped from the shadows in Dorset Street as she was leaving Babbage's home and accosted her.

An account of the meeting survives in a letter Ada sent to Mary Somerville in 1835. She describes her stalker as a man of average height in his middle years, balding, with auburn hair heavily greyed and a "stout" figure. He walked with a limp and leaned heavily on a cane. Ada doesn't put a name to her "devil" in this letter, but in light of later events it's clear that this could be none other than George Gordon, Lord Byron himself.

No account in any hand survives of his talk with his daughter, but given the events which followed it's certain that she told him everything

regarding the analytical engine, even if not the ends to which it would be put. However, she couldn't have known that for ten years her father had been an active agent of the Faction, and was therefore fully aware of the threat such a device could pose. Ada's response to this meeting is perhaps predictable, given her nature and upbringing: a desire to please the father from whom she'd been kept so far removed, even before his supposed death, and perhaps a rebellion against the strict abstinence from adventure which had been forced upon her all her life.

In the aftermath of the doomed attack on the Eleven-Day Empire – known, thanks to Ada, as the Clockwork Ouroboros affair – it seems apparent that Byron kept his promise to maintain contact with his daughter under a number of pseudonyms, right up until her death by cancer in 1852. Ada was also able to keep a close relationship with Charles Babbage and his circle, and presumably kept her father informed of their abortive efforts to recreate the clockwork key which had used the *canon per tonos* to breach the Empire's defences. Whether Byron's continued interest in her was that of an indulgent father, or simply that of an agent using her to keep an eye on enemy forces, remains a mystery.

***THE* CALDERA [*Great Houses: Location (Homeworld)*]** The caldera can safely be thought of as the absolute, unequivocal dead centre of history. It is, after all, the site where history literally *began*, where the technology of the Great Houses locked together the framework of the Spiral Politic during the anchoring of the thread with the Homeworld as its core and its centre of regulation. It was also the site of the first attack by the Yssgaroth, and for those reasons alone the caldera occupies a place of prime importance in the consciousness of the Houses, but more crucially still it's the point where all lines of historical influence meet.

In itself the caldera wouldn't appear to be a remarkable site. Though now covered over, at first glance it would seem to be little more than an *absence*, where the Yssgaroth incursion ate away all local matter and the Houses later surrounded the area with defences and utilities of their own devising. But its position is key. Anything exerting an influence on the site of the caldera will, by definition, affect the rest of history. It's the focal point not just of time but of the Houses' culture: as the Protocols of the Great Houses are worked into the very nature of history, coded into every one of the "threads" which criss-cross the Spiral Politic, then more than any other location the caldera is the centre-point of all that the Houses know and all that the Houses *are*. Theoretically, from here everything about the Houses – their past, their future, their collective memory, even their language – could be manipulated. The Houses themselves have never risked any significant experimentation, but during the War Era at least one abortive attempt was made to introduce foreign matter to this empty space at the heart of the oldest civilisation. That the site might be vulnerable is a constant worry to the ruling Houses, something which may have been a factor in the decision to construct the Nine Homeworlds shortly before the War began.

But as much as it may seem an achilles' heel, the caldera has also proved a positive boon. At least in theory, if the caldera is attached to every other point in history then data can be drawn along the "threads" directly from any locale which needs to be monitored, a useful tool when attempting to predict the effects of any manipulation of causality. To an extent it can even be used as an all-purpose communications network, though this is dubious as data being passed along the threads would run the risk of re-

writing the continuum as it passed through countless other points across history.

And even more importantly, the caldera would seem to play a role in the construction of the timeships. The timeships are so complex in nature that it's impossible for one to be constructed without access to the kind of high-order non-linear manipulation of which only the ships are capable: each ship therefore collaborates in its own construction. Though the Houses' retro-engineering techniques are too complicated to explain in full, it would appear that these manipulations are *only* possible at the caldera site, in a specially-constructed null-zone connected to the crater's space but designed to cause as little disruption to the area as possible. Indeed, although "caldera" is the name for the physical crater itself the location is more often referred to on the Homeworld as a kind of "womb". Even apart from the overall security risk, then, the concentration of equipment and timeships makes the caldera one of the most heavily defended locations known to exist.

Should the War take an unexpected turn and the Homeworld be "removed", then the effect of the caldera's destruction is likely to be even more catastrophic than the fall of the Great Houses themselves. Only non-linear domains such as Mictlan and the Eleven-Day Empire would be likely to survive unscathed. It's probably no coincidence that in human terms "caldera" means "cauldron" as much as "crater", because this, more than anything else in existence, is the crucible of everything that's known.

CANON PER TONOS [*Lesser Species: Culture/Technology*] The word canon means *rule*, and in musical theory a canon is (put simply) music which obeys certain rules. More explicitly, in a canon one theme is played against itself with "copies" of the theme sung or played by the various participants, often with minor variations or displacements. The various ways to create such a piece hold the key to its relevance in manipulating time and space.

In its simplest form – the *round* – a copy of the theme enters after a fixed time delay, and then after the same interval another, and another, and another. Each note must be able to serve not only as part of a melody, but also as part of a harmonisation of that melody, and relies upon the observer/listener to make sense of the overall arrangement. Such multi-layered conceptual mathematics is, of course, at the heart of the science of the Homeworld, although it can be stated without fear of contradiction that the thought of encoding high-order computations in *music* would never have occurred to the Great Houses.

One of the ten Canons in the Musical Offering of J. S. Bach (1685 – 1750) is the *canon per tonos*, sometimes known as the "Endlessly Rising" canon. This canon for three voices uses the Royal Theme, plus two harmonising voices, the lower of which is in C minor. Yet when the piece concludes it's in D minor, having changed key right under the listener's metaphorical nose, and this process can continue until the piece again (after successive key-changes) returns to the original key of C minor… only the voices are now one octave higher. A marginal note by Bach suggests that this could indeed be continued into infinity if required. This process is a *strange loop*, in many ways similar to the principle of infinite recursion, which forms the basis of the matter-altering equations used in the construction of such modelled universes as Mictlan, the Eleven Day Empire and even the Great Houses' timeships.

The Canon was the first part of the Musical Offering to be unlocked by the Clockwork Ouroboros in 1834. The Ouroboros's creator Charles Babbage described the Canon as a "skeleton key", a universal cipher, and therefore (if used correctly) the key to opening pathways between higher-order worlds.

CASTS [*Great Houses: Engineered Participants (Pre-War Era)*]
Conventional warfare was never a practical possibility between the Great Houses: there was no force prepared to act as an army, or at least no force-prepared to fight. Each House maintained its own constabulary, drawn from the ranks of the servitor classes, but these groups were ceremonial rather than military. Most couldn't fire a weapon to save their lives. Anyone with the inclination to fight, even on a philosophical level, was drawn to go into exile or hermitage. Nevertheless, there were times when violence was felt to be necessary and the Houses required agents to perform straightforward but hazardous activities on their behalf, usually in the outside universe. In these instances they could call on the service of the casts.

With hindsight the casts bear an uncomfortable resemblance to the conceptual entities now used by the enemy, though the Homeworld's "first line of defence" were a different proposition in many ways. Despite their less-than-substantial natures, they existed physically in ways that conceptual beings don't and were essentially mindless. The casts were phantom-drones, hardwired into the Homeworld's noosphere, or into the operating platforms of the Houses' timeships. In this respect the casts can be considered "peripherals", extensions of either Homeworld ships or Homeworld culture, employed whenever the need arose to maintain the status quo by force. Once activated, the casts absorbed radiation from nearby space-time events via the lines of causality and converted it either into baryonic matter (giving themselves physical substance) or strange matter (allowing them to manifest in two, one or even zero-dimensional form, making them effectively invisible). Most casts were programmed with a simple set of instructions, though in emergencies it was possible to boost a cast's consciousness to near-sentience.

With the outbreak of the War, the casts suddenly seemed useless. Not only were they ineffective against conceptual opponents like the anarchitects, they'd created a false sense of security among the Houses. Most were wiped out during the initial assault on the Homeworld, which fragmented their connection to the noosphere and to the caldera. Those that weren't killed outright were reduced to plaintive phantoms, haunting their timeships and Houses without memory or reason. A force of some seventy-

three surviving casts was mustered and sent into battle against the enemy during the Lethean Campaign: it was a glorious, futile gesture. The casts were destroyed, the timeships eaten from within by the enemy's ship-eater weapons, their last stand commemorated by the firestorm which raged across the surface of Lethe for years afterwards.

However, the legacy of the casts still had a part to play in the conflict. It was only after the outbreak of the War that the Great Houses sanctioned the use of the unstable "second generation" casts: the babels, which had, centuries earlier, been responsible for the notorious slaughter at House Catherion.

CATCH-THE-BEAR'S WAR BONNET [*Remote: Relic/Technology (Earth, C19)*] Also known as Catch-the-Bear's Folly, this unusual war bonnet of the North American warrior tribes was comprised not only of quillwork and eagle feathers but also of human skin. During a ceremony known as the Sun Dance, a practise favoured by the Cheyenne, young men who sought aid in making war would have the flesh over their pectorals pierced and sharp sticks inserted. Tethers tied to a sacred cottonwood tree in the centre of the sun circle would be looped around the protruding ends of the sticks, and the men would dance around the tree until the strain of exhaustion and gravity pulled the sticks out of their flesh. The flaps of skin which remained were trimmed off by the medicine men and tied to the tree as an offering, to thank the spirits for their assistance in the young men's quests. It was thought that the pain experiences, the visions and the quasi-spiritual connections made during the trials were imprinted on these flesh offerings as a kind of organic recording.

Faction Paradox's overseer Cousin Belial, speculating on this quite casually to Catch-the-Bear after a Sun Dance ceremony, apparently planted the seeds of the idea in an already ambitious man. 'All I said was, wouldn't it be neat if so much pain could be focused and projected onto the enemy,' Cousin Belial recorded in his journal. 'The rest was his idea.'

Catch-the-Bear returned to the Sun Dance circle the night after the completion of the ceremony and removed the flesh offerings from the tree. He carefully treated the pieces of skin and fashioned a cap out of them, a typical piece of totem-design from a man who was already (as Faction Paradox had expected) following the same behavioural patterns as the "hi-tech" Remote of future human generations, the same totemic impulse which would also inspire the bizarre ghost shirts. Although Catch-the-Bear didn't suffer adverse effects from the cap's construction, his wife became crippled with arthritis in the space of time it took her to decorate it with quillwork. She was only thirty-two at the time. Catch-the-Bear ignored this portent, however, and with his two hard-earned eagle feathers attached to the bonnet attended a war council in July 1856.

Catch-the-Bear's rise was meteoric and his fall likewise. In the space of four months, from July through October of 1856, he earned the badge of

war chief and a reputation for fierceness rivalled by none. It was said that his mere gaze made his enemies fall prostrate before him, writhing from the wounds he inflicted with his eyes. But by the waning moon of October it became clear that whatever power he was calling upon was driving him mad. He was often seen wandering the camp naked except for the bonnet, and refused to remove it even when sleeping, which he began to do less and less. He started speaking in the dialects of other clans, 'babbling' as his wife called it, recounting journeys to the spirit world and giving colourful accounts of battles he'd never experienced. He plucked the hair from his head by the fistful, claiming it interfered with his connection to his ancestors (who when named were obviously not related to him at all). At one point he claimed to be receiving messages from a spirit *dakina* known as Sam Kneuppe, a name the dakina apparently shared with an American film director born almost a century later.

In December of 1856 Catch-the-Bear was found frozen to death near the place where the Sun Dance ceremony had been held in June. The war bonnet was buried with him. The women refused to touch it.

***HOUSE* CATHERION [*Great Houses: House (Pre-War Era)*]** "Fallen" House, its bloodline long-since extinct, its chapterhouse only remembered as being the site of the *Catherion Massacre* after the escape of one of the Homeworld's experimental, newly-bred babels.

The stories of the atrocity at Catherion are vague not least because there was, by all accounts, only one survivor. But if there's a sense of uncertainty in the stories, a sense of its historians being somehow unsure of its physical actuality, then it has to be remembered that all of them were House Academicians and that at this point violence on the Homeworld – let alone the kind of morbid, obsessive desecration performed by the babel – was virtually unknown. The stories suggest something carnal, or even fertile, about the babel's "works". The *House of Faces*, that great hall which the babel had decorated with the crania of many of its victims, is perhaps the most striking of the images and was made even more macabre by the precise arrangement of animal skulls on the benches opposite (an obvious precursor of the Parliaments of both Faction Paradox and the Celestis, founded many years later).

Some accounts, more dubious, suggest that the babel was wearing the 'skins, eyes and exterior organs' of its victims when it was finally brought down. If the babels were originally envisaged as more adaptable, self-aware versions of the casts, then perhaps the escaped subject was only following its instincts. With no innate physical mass of its own it became a ghost-dressed-in-skins, taking the substance of Catherion's staff instead of the base baryonic matter used by most casts. By this stage, the notion of bio-diversity was already beginning to permeate the Homeworld after millennia of sterility. It's almost as if the Catherion massacre was the price it paid, the babel ushering in the bloody and unpredictable new age.

The babel was eventually captured by a force of guards, 'dressed in black and gold, not red' (highly suggestive of the Imperator Presidency's one-time right-hand, the Order of the Weal), not without severe casualties. Less reliable reports suggest that the Subject was held in stasis at House Ixion for a time before its destruction.

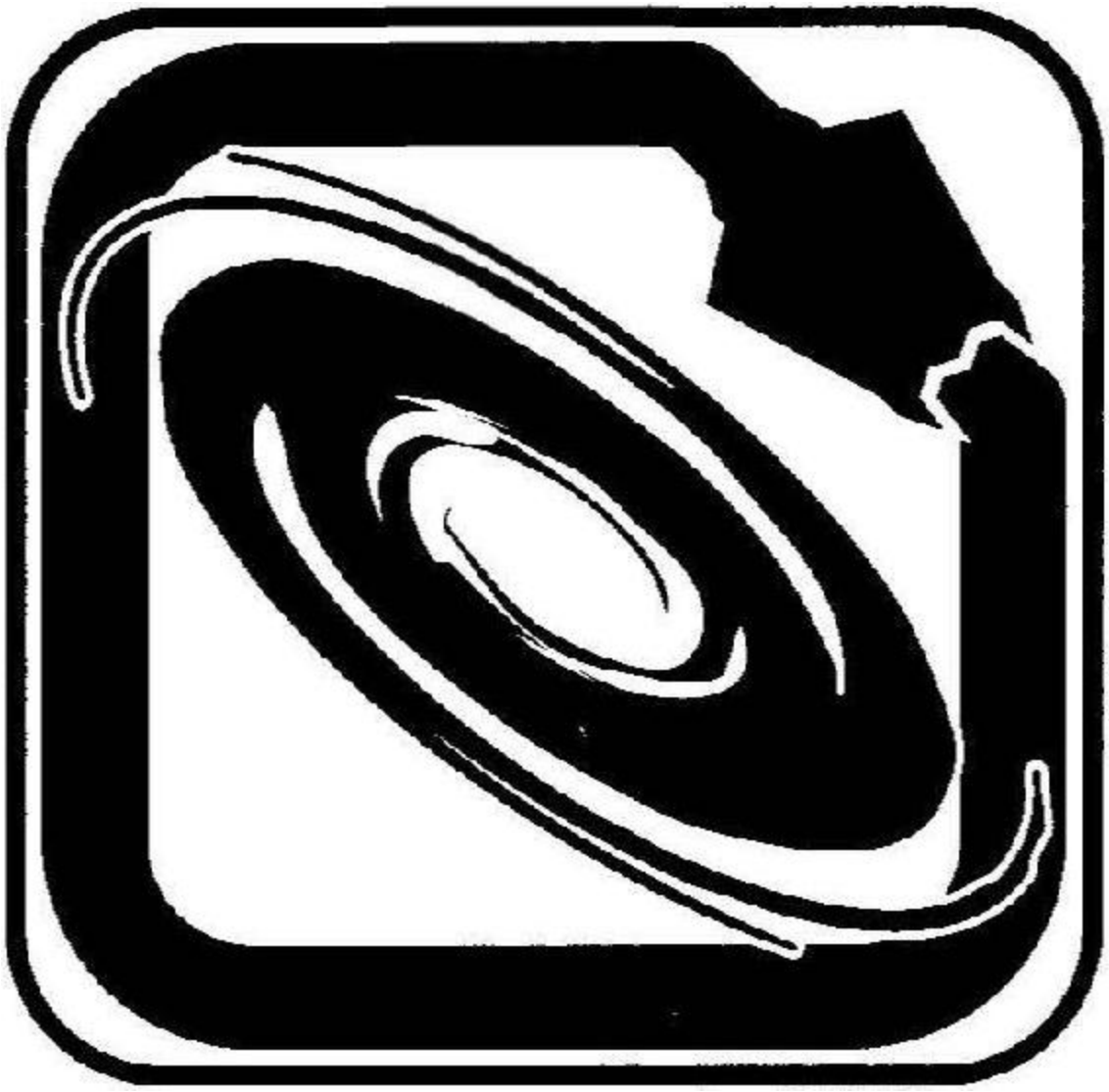
Shortly after this, the breeding engine of House Catherion which had begun the babel project was destroyed. It seems that the surviving babels

were confined in silos at an undisclosed location, slowly starved of light and radiation until they died. Three, at least, were still living in the early years of the War and were reactivated again for the time-front battles of the Lethean Campaign.

THE CELESTIS [Major Power]

'Fear, and nothing else.' – The Lords Twin Leopard.

That they still refer to themselves as "Lords" says a lot about the deluded, almost pathological nature of the Celestis: to the rest of the Spiral Politic they're so monstrously corrupt that even when they try to manifest themselves in relatively human (even supposedly beautiful) forms there's something distinctly *sickly* about them. Like Faction Paradox, the Celestis are children of the Great Houses who fell from grace, "fallen gods" who rejected the protocols of the Homeworld in the face of the War and created their own base of operations outside normal-time. But whereas the Faction might be considered to have an agenda, a justification for rebelling, even a sense of *humour*, the Celestis represent nothing but self-interest taken to its most perverse extremes, to the point where they're barely even recognisable as life in the accepted sense of the word.



[[▲ THE CELESTIS.]]

Always obsessed with titles and with status, the Celestis have frequently referred to their corrupted bloodline as the *Celestial House*, but in truth its members were taken from many of the Great Houses and ceased to have any biological link to the Homeworld when they founded their own powerbase in Mictlan. Most of the Celestis were originally politicians, members of the more active and ruthless intervention groups which appeared on the Homeworld in the millennium leading up to the War: the first generation to renounce the status quo of the ruling Houses, but instead of confronting the House elders openly (as did, for example, the Grandfather of House Paradox) the interventionists took to using

subterfuge, manipulation, conspiracy… even, perhaps, assassination. They believed it was the Homeworld's place to intervene in the affairs of the Spiral Politic, and that the structure of history should be routinely re-made to suit the Houses' own ends. Though officially the ruling Houses never agreed to such drastic measures, many of the intervention groups amassed power in the final Pre-War centuries, whispering in the ears of the elite and covertly influencing the Presidency. It's known that more than one actual *retro-genocide* was committed during the "golden age" of these groups, entire cultures erased from the timeline in blatant breach of the protocols.

If a historian were to be generous, he or she could claim that the future Celestis did this in the name of the Homeworld, purely to defend their own people. But given what they later became, there's no reason to be generous. It's more likely that the interventionists were principally driven by ambition. No other group on the Homeworld so ruthlessly demanded that the Houses should be like Gods, or rather, that in front of the lesser species they should *present* themselves as Gods. And when it became clear that the War was approaching, that the Houses were about to face an enemy just as "divine," the interventionists were the first to take the easy way out.

It wasn't so much that the elder members of the bloodlines realised they might *die* in the War, although this was a shocking enough thought in itself. But to think that everything your House, your society, your culture had ever produced might be removed from time altogether… there's no possible comfort in such a thought, no reassurance of "we may be doomed, but we had a good run," because if a culture is removed from history altogether then there was no "run". Faced with this appalling possibility most of the Houses armed themselves for warfare, convinced (after so many generations of unquestioned rule) that this was a War they could win, and had to win. Yet the interventionists saw themselves as beyond the law even of the Presidency: they told themselves that if it was unthinkable for the Houses to be wiped from history, then it was *doubly* unthinkable for it to happen to their kind. After all, weren't they the elite? Weren't they the most pragmatic, the most cunning, the most able to present a God-like façade to the lesser species?

They could have stayed on the Homeworld to fight the War. They could, like Faction Paradox, have left to find a different solution. They didn't. They simply didn't think they could take the risk.

Instead – in a move which other cultures have seen as either truly devious or utterly insane – they decided to escape the risk of being removed from history by removing *themselves* from history, albeit in a carefully-engineered way. It was known that with the correct application of technology, an object or individual could be put into a forced-paradox state in which that object was entirely removed from the timeline as if it had never been there. Yet although this process removed the object's *matter* from the universe, an observer in a null-zone state could still remember its existence. Therefore the *memetic* mass of the object – its meaning, its importance, its ability to be comprehended – remained. The object survived, but as a pure concept of itself, as a shadow of understanding with no physical mass. It was the same principle which would, once the War began, be used to create the conceptual entities.

But suppose, said the future Celestis, just suppose we did that to ourselves. Even if the Homeworld fell, we'd be safe. And beings like us, Lords and Ladies of creation that we are… even without bodies, surely we can still hold court?

There's no record of exactly how the Celestis engineered their mass-removal from history. Of course there isn't: there's now no record of them ever having existed as corporeal beings, although it's clear that they *did* just from their current status. Thus was Mictlan founded.

Unsurprisingly, the Celestis are remembered on the Homeworld as traitors. They're seen as having abandoned the Houses in the hour of greatest need, and yet the Celestis, in their arrogance, see themselves as being merely realistic. It seems somehow ironic, given that they're now barely "real" at all. And though they might be reviled at home, in the rest of the Spiral Politic they're largely dreaded, at least where they've made themselves known. They may exist only as concepts, as God-ideas ruling their citadel on the outer skin of the universe, but that doesn't mean they're *harmless*. These aren't the *loa* of Faction Paradox, invisible and intangible presences which only attack if roused. Wherever there are sentient minds to perceive

them, the Celestis can manifest themselves in a quite noticeable way. Each Lord will typically have an entire “wardrobe” of god-forms, bodies sculpted out of the ideas of the lesser species, usually designed to prove the Celestis’ own superiority. They’ve manifested themselves as devils and carved idols, as stone-faced gargoyles and many-armed things with mythic, monstrous faces; they’ve appeared as Gods of War, with grotesque and elaborate skins of armour; they’ve even (occasionally) tried to appear beautiful and angelic, although their idea of beauty is so limited that this rarely comes off.

[[▲ CELESTIS Lord Smoking Mirror, in one of his typical god-forms.]]

But these little Gods need worshippers. As the Celestis only exist as networks of ideas, they need minds which can perceive and understand

them. Still bound to tradition and protocol – albeit their own – their usual tactic is to appear before members of the lesser species, in a typically imposing form, and suggest a Faustian "bargain". As the Celestis have retained rudimentary control over life and death, it's within their power to (say) offer a subject an extended life-span, on the understanding that when he or she eventually does die his or her identity will belong to the Lords of Mictlan. The subject will be given the *Mark of Indenture*, a memetic link through which the subject, on his or her death, can be "downloaded" into Mictlan to act as the Celestis' servant in perpetuity.

It's hardly surprising that the Celestis elicit such disgust from those who encounter them, and, as they rely on the perceptions of others, this disgust only causes further corruption to their forms. But the Celestis hardly seem to care. Still believing themselves above the material universe rather than dependent on it, they sit comfortably on their thrones in the towers and fortresses of Mictlan, watching events in the outside universe (or rather, the *inside* universe, as Mictlan exists on its outer conceptual edge) like the bored Gods they believe themselves to be. In truth they have very little effect on the War, perhaps being too terrified to involve themselves in the universe they so readily escaped, but in recent years those Lords who see the War as a kind of game have begun to interfere and take sides. Although the Celestis *have* occasionally helped the Homeworld in this way, the fact that they've also supplied the enemy with conceptual entities is seen by most House agents as proof that the Celestis are vile, parasitic betrayers, and many units of the House Military are duty-bound by their own codes of conduct to destroy any "spineless monstrosities" who might be discovered in the warzone.

Of course, simply killing one of the Celestis's god-forms would achieve very little: it's notoriously difficult to shoot an idea, and as a result the Celestis might be thought of as the War Era power which has come closest to actual immortality. Besides, the Lords and Ladies themselves rarely leave Mictlan, doing most of their work through their proxies the Investigators. But an Investigator in battle-form is a worrying enough prospect in itself.

CHAOTIC LIMITER [*Great Houses: Technology*] A feature included in many (modern) time-travel devices, the chaotic limiter lets its user regulate the *causalness* of the era to which he or she is travelling, and thus the operator can decide on the malleability of the timeline. Fixing the limiter on a low setting permits the operator to make a great deal of change to the local timeline without fear of affecting the future, while a higher setting gives the traveller's actions a much greater impact. In other words, deploying a high-yield nuclear device and treading on a random butterfly would have the same effect when done under the low and high settings, respectively. Generally speaking reconnaissance is performed under low limiter settings, while engagements with hostile troops are often carried out under high settings so as to make the battle actually worth fighting, though obviously this can be a high-risk strategy.

An upper limit hasn't been discovered for the feature, and researchers continue to press the boundaries. Many excursions have been made using extremely high settings, but these have a habit of backfiring, the chaotic changes tending to negate the conditions which created them. (Some thinkers thus question the accuracy of referring to them as chaotic, but another description has yet to be found which is sufficiently appropriate and/or rational.) Various Great House academicians have theorised that the enemy is much further along in scaling the heights of upper limiter settings, leading to the Houses' difficulty in pinning down the enemy's forces. Fluxes are created using extremely high limiter settings, and the same kind of technology can be jury-rigged to produce the conceptual entities.

It's also been suggested that different areas of the continuum in themselves have different limiter settings – different levels of so-called *temporal inertia* – though it's debatable whether this is a natural effect of the universe, or whether these super-chaotic and sub-chaotic worlds have had their timelines deliberately "weakened" or "hardened" by the major powers. One of the central difficulties in preparing for any battle may be gauging the local inertia. Charts of relative inertiabars, and maps of shoals of "hard" and "soft" time, are usually among the first contraband and forgeries offered to troops landing in a time-aware area.

***THE* CITY OF THE SAVED [*Lesser Species*: *Location, Major Powerbase (World)*]** Human enclave, located beyond the end of time and supposedly containing every human being who ever lived. Its extreme chronological distance from the Homeworld's usual spheres of influence mean that reliable reports are difficult to come by: those time-travellers who visit it include a large proportion who are overly secretive or fantastically unreliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this and associated entries, this current volume accepts no responsibility for the consequences if the following material is used for strategic preparations of any kind.

The City appears to occupy, or more accurately to *comprise*, an artificially-sustained bubble universe existing after the end of the current universe and before the beginning of the next one. (This, at any rate, is the best guess of non-City chronographers. Since access for non-citizens is solely via the time corridor known as the Uptime Gate, no member of another culture has ever viewed the City from the outside.) Time-travel within the history of the City itself is supposedly impossible, and certainly outlawed, so its relations with the universe's time-active cultures take place on a subjectively contemporaneous basis. The City naturally uses Earth years, which by "coincidence" also happen to be the years of the Homeworld, so it can be stated with confidence that the City with which the time-aware civilisations currently have contact is one which has existed for nearly three centuries. By the City's dating system, the current year is 294 years After Foundation: the War therefore started in AF 244.

Ostensibly, the City's inhabitants consist of the entire human race: literally every individual in the species' lengthy history, from its sentient prehuman ancestors to its posthuman offshoots. These individuals are immortal within the City – at least, no citizen is known to have permanently died there during its three centuries of history – and normally fertile, although they're less frantically inclined to breed than during most of humanity's recorded history. The City's population thus runs easily into the septillions, increasing by a modest 0.3% a year. It's known to be far larger than could conceivably fit onto a single planet, if indeed any such bodies existed beyond the end of the universe's history. One traveller describes the City as 'an urban sprawl the size of a spiral galaxy… a fabulous shimmering

lightscape nonillions of miles across', and other accounts, while less lyrical, have tended to corroborate this. Geographically the City is predominantly urban and suburban, although with continent-sized tracts of parkland which offer ample scope for those citizens most stubbornly resistant to city life. The buildings (naturally) include examples of all humanity's architectural forms, eras and styles, but particular Districts tend to have a predominating local flavour.

Opinion is divided among the other major civilisations as to whether the universe's human population will really be resurrected through some inconceivable technological process beyond the end of time, or whether the people of the City are in fact software simulations based on unreliable historical data, their function to make the tiny handful of *real* humans remaining at the end of the universe feel at home. Yet no discrepancies have ever been discovered between known recordable history and the supposed "reconstructions" of the City. Since travellers from most of the major time-active species have visited the domain and interacted on an apparently material basis with its inhabitants, it seems evident that if they are software then they're in some way being run on the operating system of the artificial universe itself. If "real" humans do survive within the City then they must be such a vanishingly small minority as to be insignificant, although theories, rumours and urban legends surrounding these so-called Secret Architects abound.

For the vast majority of its inhabitants, the City of the Saved is a utopia. In practice an almost infinite variety of political systems exists within its boundaries, many of them totalitarian, yet within the City the shedding of human blood is alleged to be a physical impossibility. Various theories have been put forward to explain this, including that the citizens are simply programmed to believe it and accordingly refuse to manifest the symptoms of wounding or death, but the practical result is that tyranny and dictatorship are impossible to sustain. War between the Districts of the City is entirely out of the question.

Some analysts from other species have expressed the opinion that this alone makes it profoundly unlikely for the Secret Architects to have been actual humans at all, though others point to the outrageously jingoistic humanocentrism of the system. The only sentient individuals resurrected

are those of human ancestry, and there are no exceptions. Domestic and other animals are bred and kept, but requests by citizens to have pets from their previous lives resurrected have been invariably turned down. (There is in fact much doubt as to whether the City Council would be capable of honouring such a request.) Humans in romantic or other relationships with aliens have been similarly, and in many cases tragically, disappointed. While "pure" posthumans of species produced by natural evolution or genetic manipulation are considered full citizens, individuals of partial human ancestry, though resurrected by virtue of that ancestry, are treated with suspicion by many of the citizens and expressly barred from holding political office.

Nevertheless the City is the site of an eternal self-renewing Renaissance, the art and culture of a million eras blending and evolving in a seething crucible of complexity and influence. Seventy-fourth century Transhumanists collaborate with Medieval icon painters; Victorian social novelists work on microrealist documentaries; talented prehistoric cave-painters gain access to the techniques of animated film. The City's largest art gallery the New Guggenheim spreads over thousands of floors, each covering more than the surface area of Africa. William Shakespeare's (orig. 1564-1616 AD) celebrated "guns and godlings" soap opera, *The Prosperos*, is now in its fiftieth successful year. The City holds regular sporting Olympiads, at which members of other time-active cultures are occasionally invited to compete as guests. An annual holiday commemorates "Resurrection Day". The City as a whole is governed by democracy, a Lord or Lady Mayor being elected by the thousand City Councillors from their own number. The Chamber of Residents is by all accounts an astonishing structure, a stone amphitheatre capable of playing host to any respectably-sized gas giant.

The City is beyond the active influence of most players in the War, and has generally pursued an active policy of neutrality. Indeed, representatives of time-travelling species are only allowed through the Uptime Gate under sufferance. Since the beginning of the War the City Council has become less tolerant still, and members of the combatant cultures have been required to leave their temporal conveyances at the far terminus of the Gate upon arrival: a rule probably aimed primarily at barring entry to the timeships

of the Great Houses, although not always with success, as the so-called Timebeast Assault demonstrated.

Nevertheless, the City is the final major civilisation of the current universe (even if it's not strictly *in* the current universe), and its location makes it invaluable as a staging-post for operations carried out late in the continuum's history.

The City maintains embassies with a number of the major cultures of the Spiral Politic, notable ambassadorships including those of Het Linc and Amanda Legend Lefcourt. The City is known to run agents to protect human interests in numerous eras and cultures, and certain minority factions among the inhabitants are believed to do likewise. Among such an inconceivably vast population major power blocs are to be counted in the millions, but the groups within the City which have played the largest part in the affairs of the outside universe include the Ghetto of the Damned, House Halfling, the Order of the Iron Soul, the Piltdown Mob, the Rump Parliament and the Sons of Tepes. As so many of the power blocs are either affiliated with or following orders from War Era factions outside the City of the Saved, the City has been viewed by some (particularly War-obsessed) spectators as a microcosm of the War itself, albeit one with no casualties whatsoever.

The City has rarely been the target of military action by other time-active cultures, although notable campaigns have been those of Lord Foaming Sky of the Celestis and the Great Houses' own Lady Mantissa. Neither of these campaigns ended well for their instigators.

***THE* CLOCKWORK OUROBOROS [*Lesser Species*: *Technology/Event (Earth, C19)*]** The colloquial name given not only to the analytical engine constructed by Charles Babbage between 1829 and 1834, but also to the disastrous affair which resulted from its construction. Essentially a prototype computer on a grandiose scale, in 1834 the Star Chamber became aware of Babbage's plans and soon realised that it could use such a device to run the "software" of the Musical Offering, opening a path through normal-time to the Eleven-Day Empire and allowing its forces to attack the throne of Faction Paradox.

With the funding of the Chamber behind him, Babbage began work on the engine. It was nicknamed "the Clockwork Ouroboros" by Ada Byron, partly as a reference to its ability to reprogram itself – the Ouroboros being the mythological serpent which perpetually eats its own tail – but also as an in-joke, playing on the design of the Chamber's badge (the buckled Garter has long been recognised as a stylised interpretation of a coiled world-serpent, a symbol curiously similar to the sigil of the Great Houses).

By September 1834 the engine was ready to be tested. The machine was a surprisingly simple device of moveable cogs and gears which shifted numbers from one part of its system to another, operating on them mathematically much as in any other computational device. It utilised punchcards containing programs encoded in base eight, the better to decrypt the notation of the "software": in this case the Musical Offering, a piece also dependent on base eight. These cards were at the time a revolution in mechanical calculation. Decrypting the multi-layered equations contained inside the music became a simple repetitive iteration, with the machine itself constantly creating new cards for the next level of operation. Under the guidance of the Earl Marshall, The Duke of Norfolk and the Creole agent Magnus del Rio (all operatives of the Star Chamber), the Engine soon passed the first stages of testing, rapidly decrypting the data buried within the musical key and uncovering layer after layer of information.

The machine was moved secretly from Babbage's London home to the bowels of the Houses of Parliament on the 1st of October. The version of Parliament inside the Eleven-Day Empire was (and remains) the Empire's

heart, and the closer the machine was to its "real-world" equivalent the easier the Chamber believed its task would be. Using Faraday's prototype electrical devices, the machine was set in motion in the *literal* Star Chamber beneath Parliament, and the Chamber gathered its forces for the attack which would follow once the way to the Empire had been opened.

Already, in the pocket universe inhabited by the Faction, the effects of the Engine's work were being felt. The equations worked into the fabric of the Musical Offering were capable of unravelling the very nature of the Eleven-Day Empire, stone by stone if taken to their ultimate conclusion. Even at the level on which the Analytical Engine could decrypt the code, the Empire's defences were under a serious threat, with the Star Chamber room in London already being "mapped" onto the Faction's own version.

For the Faction, perhaps the worst of this affair was that the threat came from a purely human source, and a remarkably primitive one at that. For an organisation proud of the fact that not even agents of the Homeworld could penetrate its domain, this must have come as quite a shock. Faction Paradox was simply being taken on at its own game, and its opponents were making all the moves, which might have proved fatal for the Empire if the Chamber hadn't already been betrayed by one of its own members: namely Ada Byron.

Though the attack [see Eleven-Day Empire: The 1834 Attack] was ultimately a failure, it did lead to the fire which destroyed the old Houses of Parliament in the "real" London of 1834. Which is somewhat ironic, given that the version which exists in the Eleven-Day Empire is based on the new Parliament, built at Westminster as a result of the fire.

CLOSED SESSION *(OF THE RULING HOUSES)* [*Great Houses: Event (Pre-War Era)*] A Closed Session of the ruling Houses isn't a particularly rare occurrence, given the highly bureaucratic nature of Pre-War House society, but one in particular is worthy of commentary.

Roughly seventy-five years before the outbreak of the War, the Great House member later known as the War King turned himself into the Homeworld authorities. At the time he was wanted as a criminal and a renegade, whose offences taxed the limits of two entire datacoils. He asked for no clemency, but only the opportunity to address a Closed Session of the Houses, and while the ruling Houses of the time were willing to accommodate him the Presidency itself refused outright. The presidential power of veto was insufficient to stop the session, however, and in protest the Presidency (meaning not only the nominal head of House society, but the coterie of agents, advisors and academicians which surrounded him) refused to attend.

The representative of House Dvora, at the time the advisor responsible for domestic security on the Homeworld, wrote of the session in his memoirs: his account, focusing on the War King's descriptions of a coming apocalypse, is the fullest description of the Session [see below]. For many of the Houses, it was the first true acknowledgement that the War was on its way. It was also the first time the ruling Houses were given any inkling of what their future enemy might be. There's even some suggestion that the future King was already planning for the first battle on Dronid, nearly three-quarters of a century later.

There were three principal results of this Closed Session. The War King was pardoned, or at the very least his crimes were brushed under the carpet; the ruling Houses were deeply disturbed; and the Presidency was utterly furious.

After giving his report to the Closed Session, the War King departed the Homeworld once again, evidently preparing for the possibility that diplomatic efforts would be useless. It's not clear if he ever held any true hope for these overtures to a peaceful settlement. Again, his motivation is open to interpretation, depending on one's opinion of his character. Cynics suggest that he sent the ruling Houses on a fool's errand, something to

keep them busy while he himself prepared to overthrow the Homeworld. Those of a more charitable or forgiving nature believe that the War King knew his strengths, and knew that diplomacy wasn't one of them.

Very few of the ruling Houses ignored the War King altogether. Although many took his warnings with a grain of salt, and kept one eye on the War King himself, they placed enough credence in his warnings to keep their other eye squarely on the "enemy" he described. Unfortunately, the few who failed to listen had the Presidency among their numbers. Any attempt at diplomacy which the Presidency could stop was stopped. Any attempt which couldn't be stopped was given the presidential censure. There are even rumours, from the survivors of one of these attempts, that the Presidency's agents had sabotaged the timeships being used by the would-be diplomats: if true then it must have been a truly horrifying prospect, for a world where subterfuge and assassination had been unthinkable only a thousand years earlier. To the frustration of many of the ruling Houses, no diplomatic contact was established with this "future enemy" at all. The few missions which weren't shot down in committee or sabotaged from within never came back, and so things remained until the War King eventually returned forty years later, at the time of the Faraway Declaration.

In retrospect it seems likely that the Presidency's stubbornness was organised from behind the scenes by the extreme intervention groups, later to become the Celestis. Though the interventionists had been demanding a greater involvement in the outside universe for centuries, they did this only out of a belief in the superiority of their own bloodlines … and the existence of a possible rival was something they were still unable to accept. For them, even to acknowledge the enemy was to admit defeat.

The Closed Session

From House Dvora's Account:

'This criminal, this *renegade*, spoke to us of an enemy which scared even him. Now, of course, everyone's familiar with the tales told to startle the young: the Yssgaroth, the fallen Houses, the Thing-Under-the-Loom. And if those old and mythical menaces seemed ridiculous and far-away, then you can imagine how we responded to the thought of an enemy which was

even *worse*. We liked to think of ourselves as sceptics, as rational thinkers, as the just and reasonable arbiters of all we surveyed, but whenever we'd raise a point which we thought would collapse his horror-stories, he'd show us another piece of evidence to turn the point around, and make things ever more believable and ever more appalling.

'Many of us – well, myself, at least – realised that this must have been what he told the Presidency when he'd been here five years earlier [see under War King]. It was easy to see how such news could have broken the legendary presidential stoicism. And it was the same with a lot of the Closed Session's members, I know. I saw many an Oldblood walk into that room the epitome of overconfidence, and walk out pale and harried. It was as if they'd suddenly been told just how frail, how *biological*, they truly were.

'Even those of us not hopelessly overwhelmed felt out of our element. I recall thinking that perhaps I should go and *arrest* this great enemy, absurdly. It was, of course, the [future] War King who made it clear what we had to do. Confrontation, in one form or another, was necessary. The longer we ignored this enemy, the worse our situation would become. He urged us to contact it through diplomatic channels. When one of the representatives raised the question of whether drawing attention to ourselves was a good idea, the King asked two questions: "what makes you so sure that we haven't attracted its attention already?", and "do you really think we'll be any safer if it doesn't notice us?".

'As for the War King… he said he'd be preparing other fields of interaction. I don't know if any of us could have foreseen what that interaction could be – I certainly didn't – but it can't be denied that his preparations were welcome beyond measure, when the time came.'

COMPASSION [Remote: Participant (Present)]

'The name's supposed to be ironic. Obviously.'

Only fragmentary records exist regarding the woman who was originally born under the name of Laura Tobin, and later called Compassion. The main source of data is an autobiographical novel written by Carmen Yeh, who travelled with her for some time. Thus, Compassion's story is far from complete. Her unprecedented transformation, as her original human form was re-sculpted into the only known human/timeship hybrid, is well-documented: her adventures beyond this point, as a lone traveller, refugee and even "terrorist", are more obscure. However, she clearly spent much of her early life as a timeship attempting to avoid the attentions of the Great Houses.

The Houses, with the War bearing down on them and desperate to acquire any potential new weapons, dedicated itself to the capture and study of the hybrid even before Laura Tobin's transition was complete. But Compassion had clearly been primed for a more *independent* existence. She was quite aware of her importance as a new form of cross-breed, yet had her own concerns, being fiercely protective of her own internal dimensional mass and unwilling to participate in the Houses' planned force-breeding project. It was at this point, probably as a result of her violent resistance the Homeworld's advances, that she was designated a "subversive influence" by the ruling Houses' allies among the lesser species. By the time the War finally broke out Compassion still hadn't been located, although there's some evidence that she may have been involved in the first battle on Dronid.

At this point, we encounter the largest gap in Compassion's story. It's virtually certain that with the War in progress the Great Houses reached some form of agreement with her: this would explain the existence of the 103-form timeships, as well as frequent suggestions that Compassion was in some way the *mother* of the first 103-forms even though the idea of childbirth is known to have appalled her. Whatever the case. Compassion was still freely roaming the universe when she encountered Carmen Yeh.

Yeh was no stranger to time-travel, having made numerous journeys with *another* renegade from the Homeworld before encountering Compassion in Alaska, 1758. She'd actually been inadvertently left there by her earlier companion, and Compassion agreed to 'give [Carmen] a lift' until she met up with her previous associate again. This obviously took longer than either party had been expecting, given that Carmen's account of these voyages with Compassion take up almost three years. Nothing from these voyages deserves too much scrutiny, save for evidence that Compassion had evidently been travelling quite extensively since her transformation into a timeship, considering that so many varied individuals recognised her from earlier encounters. The only item of real interest involves Compassion's meeting with the War King, although it's notable that she maintained a permanent link to the causality of Earth during this period: this may or may not have been due to Yeh's influence.

Compassion's current whereabouts are unknown. She's not thought to have taken on a new passenger/pilot/companion since Yeh, and Yeh's account suggests that they parted company only after Compassion made a *second* pact with the Great Houses, which seems to have involved Compassion acting as an agent of the House Military. But if this is true then Compassion can hardly be a regular kind of soldier, or even a particularly loyal one. Perhaps the most telling part of Yeh's account is what Compassion told her shortly before they left each other: 'If they want me to fight their War, I'll fight it. But their "enemy"… it's a distraction, it's nothing. The *real* threat's going to come from family [the account doesn't specify whose]. Believe me, I'll be changing sides again as soon as House Lucia shows itself.' (It should be mentioned that there is no House Lucia among the Great Houses. But Yeh's account was highly fictionalised, and she often changed the names of characters and locations to suit her own purposes.)

Wherever Compassion appears in the war-zones of the Spiral Politic, she makes no secret of her presence. She's 1.64 metres in height, appears slightly heavy-set though not actually overweight, has dark red hair and pale skin with facial freckles often described as being almost too randomly-placed. Like all hominid-sentient timeships she can change her appearance to suit her immediate environment, though she rarely changes anything but her apparent clothing. On the *inside*, of course, her body is an

enormous cross-dimensional realm which could, if pressed, comfortably carry several thousand people. The sight of her body “opening” to admit passengers is generally found quite disturbing by witnesses, although Compassion doesn’t seem bothered what they think of her. Practical to a fault and utterly unimpressed by the posturing of the modern Houses, she knows there’s very little in the continuum that can harm her and tends to treat the universe with a sardonic disinterest.

Without doubt, she has an agenda of her own. She’s simply bored by the attempts of many parties involved in the War to try to get in its way. [For picture, see under Laura Tobin.]

CONCEPTUAL ENTITIES [*Celestis: Engineered Participants*]
Engineered beings or weapons (in many cases conceptual entities are both) which exist only as concepts, and have no provable substance at all.

This is a reasonably subtle idea, and several cultures involved in the War have had difficulty grasping it. As conceptual entities only seem to affect the minds of their victims, it's often said that the entities are 'made out of pure thought', but this is clearly inaccurate as *thought* itself isn't a substance. Although many people are determined to think of the entities as telepathic presences, or neurological parasites, or in some cases even "spirits", in fact it's much more accurate to think of them as nothing more than hostile ideas. They exist by bypassing matter altogether, and instead giving themselves structure inside the *meanings* of things.

For example, a victim affected by a conceptual entity might be reading a book and suddenly discover that there are messages in the text which shouldn't be there, communications from an entity which has (like any good idea) taken root in the invisible connection between the book and the reader's mind. The victim isn't hallucinating these messages.

They have indeed been planted in the book, probably in exactly the same font and style as the rest of the text. But the entity hasn't changed the physical nature of the pages at all. Instead, the network of understanding which surrounds the reader – what Nevitz called "the topology of comprehension" – has been used to alter the meaning behind the book. In effect, the entity has wormed its way into culture itself.

The Celestis are, at least in part, a race of high-intensity conceptual entities. It's therefore not surprising that the Celestis are still the masters of conceptual engineering, and in recent years those Celestis who oppose the Homeworld have supplied the enemy forces with a whole host of specially-designed military concepts. The most blatant of these are, of course, the anarchitects. To some extent the Celestis' realm of Mictlan is an entire conceptual *ecosystem*, and is thought to be unique in this respect. [See also fluxes.]

CONFUSION [*House Military: Terminology*] Both a consequence of time-active War tactics and a tactic in itself, many strategists now think of confusion as being a tangible *presence*: or at least, it's now accepted as an exact and scientific term rather than just a way of describing a mess.

It must be remembered that it's impossible to lose a time-active battle by dint of having too few troops (simply double any survivors' timelines back on themselves, although this is stretching the Homeworld's Protocols to breaking-point and is usually only done on a temporary basis) or by dint of insufficient pre-planning (since it's possible to pre-arrange tactics in local time). It's not even necessarily possible to lose a battle solely by dint of actually having *lost* it, as it can generally be fought again. It is, however, possible to have lost a battle – and for it to remain lost – if it remains unrecognised that a victory has in fact been achieved. It's this principle which made most of the more aggressive campaigns mere window-dressing for the second-level war being fought out in a much more subtle and insidious manner.

The uncertain nature of victory in this War has been a positive boon for the Great Houses' enemies, to the point where the "Probability" Doctrine is now routinely drilled into House Military units in order for them to retain their grasp of what *is* and *isn't* acceptable in the field of battle. However, for those interested in the way that confusion can affect an entire large-scale ecosystem there's no better example than the world of Utterlost: or at least, there *wouldn't* be if it weren't for the fact that nobody can even get close to Utterlost.

***THE* CULT OF CELEBRITY DEATH [*Faction Paradox: Group (Early War Era)*]** A temporary fad in Faction Paradox recruitment policy which misfired badly.

The theory ran thus. Some individuals are more famous for their deaths, the manner of them and the belief that they'd survived them, than their lives. Godfather Morlock, always a grandiose name-dropper, began to investigate the biodata of these individuals and realised that they were all-powerful attractors: capable of luring the attention of just about anyone or anything not because they were "powerful" in themselves, but just because they occupied such culturally crucial points in history. They also tended to be wilful, confident and to have astonishing self-survival instincts. As the War became increasingly bloody and the Faction found more and more of its powerbases eradicated by the Great Houses, it was felt that such charismatic members of the "celebrity dead" would be excellent poster-boys and poster-girls for recruitment. If Lord Byron leapt up and demanded a charge against the Faction's numerous opponents, then half the table would be following before they even realised what they were doing.

One look at the names of the more notorious recruits from this movement suggests how the policy backfired. Anastasia, Dyavol, Byron. A rogue's gallery of lost causes and members who tangented away from the War itself. Following the laughable pantomime of the Rasputin travesty, *all* sides involved in the War now tend to shy away from famous personalities altogether, dead or otherwise.

***CHRISTOPHER RODONANTÉ* CWEJ [*House Military: Participant (Earth, C30/Present)*]** Pawn, talented commando or persuasive insurrectionist? The more one considers Christopher Cwej – a human-born former member of a high-risk, heavily-armed law enforcement agency (c. 2975 AD) and later House Military agent – the harder he becomes to decipher. For although Cwej spent much of his professional life as a easily-manipulated disciple, whose interest in the law may well have been inspired by a child-like desire to engage in protracted high-speed chases who often seemed more interested in the mysteries of customised vehicles, high-impact weaponry and members of the opposite sex than in seizing command, his later rise to authority stemmed from a single attribute: he didn't die. More than anything else this eventually put him in a unique position to influence the War, proof that pawns sometimes reach the far end of the chessboard and become royalty.

Definitely not *stupid*, but over-eager and often naive, in his native era the junior officer Cwej seemed born to enthusiastically follow older and more experienced operatives into maximum-risk situations. Though it's true that his survival was largely due to his own (unquestionable) abilities in the field, his habit of throwing himself into the thick of battle and emerging unscathed must have made him appear as a kind of "luck-child" to both his fellow officers and the observers of the Great Houses. He may have seen his recruitment by the War-time powers as a kind of promotion, or possibly just an opportunity for a new kind of adventure against the (supposed) scheming master-villains of the Spiral Politic, and during his early years as a House cat's-paw he brought exactly the same enthusiasm to his "cases" that he'd brought to his work in his own era. It's impossible to enter the War and remain unchanged, however, and although Christopher Cwej began life as a tall, blond-haired male of seemingly Canadian extraction, in the course of his service to the Houses both his body and his biodata became seeded with a wide selection of reconstructive mutagens: in short, he aspired to front-line service as a regen-inf trooper.

When Cwej suffered a catastrophic, lethal irradiation in the course of his service, circumstances provided his body with an opportunity to re-create itself in a more War-friendly form. The idea may even have excited him at

first (human culture being obsessed with the notion that superhuman abilities are *always* created by exposure to radiation), although the slow cellular death of his original body can hardly have been the great adventure Cwej had been expecting. Nor did he emerge in the form he might have anticipated, as the sudden need for a human-form agent in an area of the Spiral Politic occupied by the Remote compelled the strategists of the House Military to take a direct hand in his biological destiny. Accordingly the Houses suppressed the mutagens in Cwej's biosystem, recorporating him in a dark-haired, strictly hominid body, resembling – as one of Cwej's acquaintances put it – 'Friar Tuck without the haircut'.

Cwej had been a loyal agent of the Houses ever since his recruitment, but this could have been the point at which he started to feel a degree of resentment. The more *adolescent* aspects of Cwej's psyche may be reflected in the fact that although he was prepared to see the Houses carry out some fairly heavy-handed "cultural sterilisations" in Remote-space, he only began to question the strategists' wisdom when they forced him into a short, fat, middle-aged body. From the Houses' point of view the new form was ideally constructed, designed to appear not only human but utterly innocuous, and as the Houses have little empathy with the thought-processes of the lesser species they may not have predicted Cwej's response. Alternatively it's possible that the body was in part a trial-by-flesh, a test to see if Cwej would accept House strategy without question.

If it *was* a test, then he didn't exactly pass it with flying colours. In the following months Cwej became less than reliable, not actually mutinous but quite profoundly *sulky*. Certain members of House Mirraflex advocated culling, though more far-sighted voices prevailed. While the new-form Cwej was effectively a blank slate, he agreed to formally enrol in the Great House military academy under Kobe, generally known as the Gauntlet: Cwej was still considered a young bio-form, despite his somewhat worn-in body, and there was certainly an opportunity for re-training. On the other hand his posting to the academy could have been a way of giving the Houses immediate access to his biomass, as it was during his attendance that the unwitting Cwej was used as a prototype template for their Army of One project.

The result was the mass-production of Cwejen, and despite the original Cwej's many successes in the field it's his expansion into an army for which he's best known. As there are now several hundred iterations of Cwej at large in the Spiral Politic, many of them showing the desire to self-replicate, Cwej is becoming an increasingly difficult person to ignore.

CWEJEN [*House Military: Group (Present)*] The accepted plural form of "Cwej".

In the War Era. the mass-production of troops is something of an art form. "Vulgar" technologies like cloning are next to useless: the in-built armaments of most House Military troops are encoded in biodata, and as cloning only copies base genetic matter any cloned force will have a virtually blank biodata profile, leaving itself open to mass erasure at the hands of any time-active enemy. The only truly effective mass-production method involves not simply re-engineering a soldier's body but re-engineering his or her entire relationship to history, yet if this process is to produce stable troops in the long term then it requires a carefully-selected subject. The Houses' Army of One project was one of only two successful applications of this technique, and the timeline-donor was the House's agent Christopher Rodonanté Cwej.

Without entering into too much technical detail, the Houses diffracted Cwej's timeline so as to interact the different near-parallel versions of himself, culling the disappointing destructive interference-pattern Cwejen and only keeping those Cwejen in which the interaction drove them to new transhuman peaks of capacity. They turned Cwej into an *entangled man*, then broke the entanglement to leave the surviving selfs (*never* "selves", in this context) cut off from each other and capable of independent action. The results of the technique were varied, but certain peak occurrences did predominate, and this provided access to three unique temporal forms: the three faces of Cwej, the trinity of bodies he'd worn (or almost worn) in his time as a House Military agent. Naturally this variation was the reason behind the choice of Cwej as an experimental subject in the first place, the rationale being that a complete multi-tasked army could be assembled from a single timeline. It's therefore most likely – but not certain – that any Cwej encountered in the Spiral Politic will resemble, one of the following:

[[▲ CWEJEN: Cwej, Cwej and Cwej.]]

1. The blond-haired “Cwej-Prime”. Before the events which led to his recruitment by the Great Houses, Christopher Cwej worked in law

enforcement on Earth. Thus, the Cwej-Primes are ideally suited to serve as combat pilots, commandos and, when required, low-level "grunts". Due to the temporal difficulties in obtaining the other two Cwej-forms, the Cwej-Primes made up the hulk of the original army.

2. The dark-haired "Cwej-Plus". The mutagen-cleansed version of Cwej created during his missions in the Remote era. The Houses removed the heavy-armament traits from Cwej's body, but carefully retained some qualities to aid Cwej in the growing War, crafting Plus as an ideal tactician and ground-level leader with a talent for wetwork and covert operations. 'The Pluses mainly comprise the officer corps within the ranks of the army, although there are plenty of exceptions (notably its chief commander, the Cwej-Prime "Damen"). Only thirty-two Pluses served in the original company of 216 Cwejen.

3. The armoured "Cwej Magnus." Magnus, the potential regen-inf Cwej, was earmarked for heavy artillery work as well as other tasks not requiring flexibility or subtlety. Since this particular version never actually existed it was the most difficult to mass-produce, and only eight were created for the prototype company.

The Great Houses pondered appointing the original Christopher Cwej to lead the Army of One, but socialisation problems at the Gauntlet made him an unsuitable candidate. Several altercations with other cadets – in particular a duel which resulted in noticeable scars along the side of his neck and across his forehead, scars which unlike his disgusted opponent he was able to retain – convinced the Great House administration that Cwej was not yet ready to command soldiers in the field. Accordingly the Great Houses prepared "Damen" for command, allowing him to retain most of the original's experiences. The Cwejen have so far shown no signs of rebelling against House authority, having generally retained the optimism of the younger Christopher Cwej, though a few have occasionally asked for either greater rights as individuals or recognition as a discrete bloodline. As a result, several strategists have rather cruelly begun to refer to them as the "Little House of Cwejes".

The original Cwej-One is still in the employ of the Houses, but is known to have become a loner by nature (his claim being that 'once you've spent

time with two-hundred of yourself, you never want to go near anyone else again'). No longer the brash and somewhat over-eager agent he once was, his only recent mission of note was his investigation into Faction Hollywood and his encounter with Michael Brookhaven, the only other individual to successfully employ Army of One techniques. As an individual with mixed feelings towards his employers, it's expected that the Houses will only call the primal Cwej back into service when the situation desperately warrants it.

D-MAT [*House Military: Technology*] The most feared technology of Pre-War times, and hence the one most referenced in War Era design strategy. Fairly standard world-scale defence weapons would be renamed in its honour, and it would become an almost comforting standard: 'D-Mat 'em 'til they aren't, and hit 'em when they weren't' was briefly a rallying call on at least one Military front. Troops engaged in forced regen missions are usually equipped with at least one "totemic" D-Mat weapon, simply because it gives the lower ranks something on which to focus while they adjust to their new bodies, while faux D-Mat technology is also a firm favourite with those more eccentric Fourth Wave units which still favour burlesque devices However, the original weapon – lost during the opening strikes of the War according to some accounts, biding its time according to others – wasn't a large-scale device of disintegration at all but an *omnicalculator*, conceived on a truly unprecedented scale despite its relatively small physical mass.

A quantum computer linked to the causal nexus in much the same way as one of the Homeworld's timeships, the machine would scan its target and read the victim's complete timeline, then remodel everything else in creation *without* the target. The weapon didn't harm anything per se, but from an enemy's point of view being built out of molecules which the universe doesn't remember is harm enough. For the target there's no gap in the air in which to stand, no spare molecules to breathe, no history to demand action and no present in which to act.

Never-having-been is crueller than it may appear. The victim doesn't run screaming to his or her family's door, and never gets to see the mute incomprehension in their gazes. The victim has no hands. The victim has no eyes. He or she does, however, exist. The gun knows the victim: it had to, to cut the target out of causality. That precision requires knowledge of every particle which ever weaved its way through the target's body, and that knowledge becomes indistinguishable from the particles themselves, once the data is detailed enough.

Some cultures talk of weapons which eat souls. Only one built a weapon which ate everything *except* the soul, and spat it out, alone, naked and shivering.

DATING WAR ERA EVENTS (DIFFICULTIES) [*Terminology*] In a War where both sides exist in a special relationship to the main bulk of history, and where any given battle can be fought and re-fought *ad nauseum*, dating events according to a single calendar is a guaranteed impossibility. Although most War Era dating systems insist on at least *three* dates for every event (Homeworld time, local time and War-relative time), perhaps the most effective system was that developed by the Autrobulus hive during the era of its history known as the "dispersal". Engineered by the Great Houses, the hive had a literally genetic grasp of history, and after the ill-fated attempt on its integrity staged by the *This is all meaningless, of course. Let's be honest, most history is boring and inaccurate. It's boring because chroniclers are concerned with events: X battle happened on V date (or War-relative date, if you insist) resulting in Z outcome/s. It's on too big a scale. It's only when we change the scale, when we look at the soldiers instead of the armies, that we can really see what was really going on. And maybe it helps us see the history in our own lives. Don't you think?*

I don't know any more. There are no absolutes in my life, these days. Of course, having said that, I realise it's an absolute. In fact I could probably think of a few things which disprove that statement, but the bottom line is I can't be bothered. Oh, by the way, it's me again. You know, the ***Shift****. We met before in the "B" section, under "Beshielach."*

So where were we? That's right. I was turning into a biomass popsicle on that ice-world I mentioned. I died there, as it happens. In a sense, anyway; the enemy found me, which is much the same thing. Used me for spare parts, or to be more precise, used my timeline for spare parts. The mission wasn't even supposed to be that dangerous, but then, nothing's dangerous until it is. It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye. (Then I'd be the Shft, wouldn't I? Sorry. Given my state of existence, playing with language is the closest thing I've got to a form of exercise.) This is, in case you were wondering, how I came to be the debonair network of free-form concepts which you see before you today. I won't go into the details of what happened next, it'd take a book in itself and then I'd have to metatextualise, but the upshot is that I ended up being sold off and working for new management without any idea of who I was or where I'd come from. Fortunately… at least from one perspective… the Celestis who "acquired" me were a fairly

patient bunch of Machiavellian extra-universal entities. In fact, as Machiavellian extra-universal entities go they were probably the most patient. Some of them wanted to kill me, admittedly. Their view was that no matter how subservient I might seem, I'd always be marked with the brand of another power. Others pointed out that I hadn't been taken willingly, that I'd had their Mark forced on me. But in the end, the more curious and/or forgiving voices won out. I think they pitied me a little, given that we were all non-corporeal entities together.

So the Celestis were conceptual entities, just like I was. Bigger and more intense than me, obviously. One quick stabilisation of my condition, and I was theirs, lock, stock and barrel, I also got my sanity back.

At least until I realised that there was no way out.

So, do you still want to know about the dating of War Era events? Pedant. Oh, go on then. Go and look at the material about the Greater Autrobulan Franchise, see what you can learn from that. Believe me, though, it won't be worth it.

***ACADEMICIAN* DEVONIRE [*Great Houses: Participant (Early War Era*]**
Diplomat, reconciler, theorist and the first of the Academicians for Game Logic, if not for the incidents which cast a shadow over his later life Devonire might still be a beloved figure among the Great Houses. A great orator, debater and negotiator, he served in the ruling body of the Houses long before the War, but it was only after the conflict became inevitable that Devonire's abilities proved their worth and his status began to rise. As an Academician for Game Logic, he felt that the War signalled a need to end the constant dissent and in-fighting which had marred House society since the Imperator Presidency. He not only developed agreements between the more ambitious Houses, he was one of the first to negotiate treaties with worlds in the outside universe, virtually unthinkable only a century earlier. Under the regime of the War King he drafted pardons for criminals whose skills could be used in the War effort, and even convinced a handful of the bloodlines which had left the Homeworld during the diaspora to return and put to use whatever their Houses might have learned during the intervening millennia. It was Devonire, too, who first pointed out the tactical inevitability of using members of the lesser species as permanent agents.

Yet even after all these successes, Devonire was left unsatisfied. His vision was of a Homeworld which, even after the (anticipated) defeat of the enemy, would stand united. And there was still one sizeable House which stood apart. In a speech before the assembled command, he referred to this errant bloodline as 'the last, most errant House, without whom we will never be whole'. He was, of course, referring to Faction Paradox. The fact that the Homeworld's complete prohibition of the Faction was (briefly) lifted during this period is in itself evidence of Devonire's standing in the early War Era.

Faction Paradox was a particular problem for his negotiating skills. He was an expert at finding mutual advantage for any two negotiating parties, but he simply had nothing to offer the Eleven-Day Empire. Yet Devonire refused to rest. He would spend days sitting in the same spot, his balcony overlooking the caldera site, contemplating what he could offer the Faction's members in order to make them return home… whether the ruling Houses would welcome them or not. His eventual conclusion, based

largely on the fetishistic nature of the Faction, was that the only thing which might feasibly gain the bloodline's favour was the arm of Grandfather Paradox: the mythical severed limb which had been separated from its owner on the same day that the Faction itself was founded, during the notorious Act of Severance. Given the complete failure of the Great Houses to understand the "symbolic" on most occasions, it seemed an entirely reasonable conclusion.

That the quest for the Grandfather's Arm lead to the downfall and disgrace of Devonire, to the point where his name is now considered almost *embarrassing*, says more about the Great Houses than it does about the Academician himself. At present he remains in stasis, the most notable individual ever to suffer the consequences of paradox anxiety. But with the War taking a heavy toll on the Homeworld, the Game Logic era was fast drawing to a close, and perhaps his fall from grace was inevitable no matter what. The *next* contact between the Houses and the Faction would be far from diplomatic. [For picture, see under Great Houses.]

***THE* DIASPORA [*Great Houses: Event (Pre-War Era)*]** In an era when the Protocols of the Great Houses are more rigidly-enforced than ever before, it's common for those renegade groups which do still exist to claim descent from some ancient and noble tradition. Many historians among the breakaway cells – including some from Faction Paradox itself – claim that their own cults were "the original renegades", but this claim must be treated with caution. Firstly, it has to be remembered that the very term "renegade" is a comparatively modern and politicised one. A renegade doesn't simply leave the Homeworld: he or she abandons it. It's a ritual act, signifying contempt for the cultural and social strictures of the Houses. To become a renegade is almost to specify oneself as something other than everything in the cosmos which is not renegade. Why else do they strip off their names and birthrights? It's virtually an act of self-mutilation. It's also an act of hatred against a world which demands, or pretends to demand, complete and unflinching introversion of self and society.

In fact it's a matter of record that a number of individuals and groups left the Homeworld during or immediately after the anchoring of the thread, at the very beginning of recordable history. Though never a coherent movement as such, these groups have been described collectively as the *Diaspora*. In modern times this has been amended to the First Diaspora or Eremite Diaspora, after the quasi-religious Eremites who made up such a large part of the refugee army, the one group which *can* make a plausible claim to be descended from "the original renegades". The anchoring saw upheaval on a grand scale, overturning not merely the fundamental biology of the Homeworld but also the complete social infrastructure of the Houses. Some bloodlines were wiped out overnight, their names erased from history. Others were forged out of nothing. Some of the most notable Houses of prehistory – Catherion, Ixion and many others – went into terminal decline, their positions suddenly usurped by Lineacrux or Mirraflex. They died long, drawn-out deaths over millions of years. These were fearful times, often violent times, and it's understandable that some fled what they saw as madness or savagery. Terror drove the Diaspora, for the most part, though the Eremites themselves were a notable exception.

In modern times, the Diaspora is mainly referred to as the First Diaspora by those fore-sighted few who predicted the War centuries before the first

battle. They fear the enemy will eventually destroy the Homeworld, its clone-worlds, and all the hiding places of the Houses. At this point the displaced children of the Homeworld will eventually be forced into a vast Second Diaspora which will dwarf the original in its size and implications.

It's even possible that the prophets of doom, consumed by the urge to be proved right, would give anything to see this happen.

DJINN [*Lesser Species: Legendary Participants (Mal'akh)*] In Arabic myth, a race said to have once stood at the side of the angels until their leader, Eblis (or Iblis) refused to bow down to Adam at the command of God and was cast out of Heaven, taking his followers with him. Eblis – also known by the name "Azazel" before his fall – was described as an angel 'born of fire', and is almost certainly the same as the rebel angel familiar to readers of the Book of Enoch. Clearly, then, this is a variant of the same legend.

Indeed the djinn, who were said to have been bested and placed under the control of the human magician King Solomon himself, were ostensibly ordered by the King to find one-hundred maidens for his harem: when he died they kept the women for themselves, mating and producing the *Peri* race, the Arabic equivalent of the *Nephilim* from the Book of Enoch. They're described as beautiful angels who "disguised their malevolence under their charming appearance".

The parallels with the Mal'akh legends are unmistakable, meaning it's probably reasonable to assume that the Mal'akh, the Nephilim and the Peri are all manifestations of the same biomass. In other literature, most notably the *Arabian Nights*, many examples of their powers are given. They're giants who 'suffer from a devouring hunger, but cannot eat', and are masters of illusion and the desert storms, capable of changing their shape at will or manipulating time and matter to suit themselves. The most powerful of the djinn, the *ifrit*, may even be Arabian versions of the Edimmu who are said to hold sway over the entire Mal'akh presence on Earth.

DRONID [*Faction Paradox: Location (World)*] One of the *scarred worlds* of the early War Era, Dronid is home to an early-industrial hominid-descended culture but is chiefly remembered as the site of the first battle of the War, which began as a kind of complex gang-feud between the "Spiral Underworld" groups being used as proxies by both sides before escalating – as the Warring parties always knew it would – into a full-scale military confrontation. [For a full account of this, see Appendix I.]

Fifty years on, Dronid has never really recovered. The battle only lasted for one night, but the surface of the world has been a bleached and corrosive place ever since, even if the majority of its native inhabitants survived the attacks and many of its city-states remain standing after half a century of decline. Huge tracts of the world were left uninhabitable by the battle, the fallout from House Dvora's *engines of protection* still clogging up the atmosphere, and even as the people came out from their shelters, the surviving off-worlders were beginning to evacuate. Undoubtedly there was still valuable time technology left on Dronid, perhaps even a few "relics" destined to become major totems in future years, but overall staying on the world suddenly seemed a liability.

In fact, Dronid was a safer place than it might have seemed. With the off-world powerbases devastated by the battle, Dronid had lost its tactical value in the space of one night: events there had begun a chain reaction, bringing the forces of both the Great Houses and their new War-time enemy into the open across the Spiral Politic, so already the two sides had taken the fight elsewhere. Still, few off-world groups have attempted to retake the world in the last fifty years, perhaps feeling that their presence would only tempt a new apocalypse. Yet predictably, there's still a great deal of criminal activity on Dronid. The world is now desperate to rebuild itself, and in such desperate times the *local* criminal groups have become the only reliable, if unethical, source of food and survival equipment in many regions. What's interesting is that the most prominent groups have taken on the mantles of their off-world predecessors, so at least one organisation still believes itself to be following in the enemy's footsteps even though the enemy has no real presence on Dronid at all. In fact the only truly non-local group which survives there is Faction Paradox, and

then only because the Faction's survivors from the first battle had nothing else to do *but* re-build their own organisation.

Today the Faction's mission-house on Dronid is far more concerned with ritual observance than with power-building, although it retains links to the underworld and still collects any fragments of time-technology it might be able to dig out of the ruins. Few Faction outposts come so close to turning the organisation into something *religious*, taking in and/or converting the desperate of Dronid whenever resources allow it. The mission has reestablished links with the Eleven-Day Empire, and although the Empire has little time to rebuild its Dronid powerbase it does at least keep an eye on events there. Some new Faction recruits are even sent to the mission to serve their apprenticeship as a Little Brother or Little Sister – perhaps the Faction feels that the former warzone can give them a good feel for modern politics – and at least one promising Little Sister has recently been returned from Dronid to the Eleven-Day Empire to become a protege of the Godfathers.

***HOUSE* DVORA [*Great Houses: Ruling House*]** In the brief period before a species loses its interest in its evolutionary surroundings, it's relatively common for societies to be categorised as *tribal*, and for the ruling body to be seen as either an alpha-male among primates or as a dominant predator among lesser animals. While for the Great Houses such ideas have mostly been forgotten, a number still cling, oddly, to House Dvora: the House of Devouring Hounds.

This isn't a metaphor for a House at the top of the food chain, a rare, vicious, rampaging beast. It's an emblem of controlled, concerted, *voracious* power. Neither gauche nor hidebound, the members of House Dvora look out across the landscape of the Homeworld from the comfortable position of an established pack predator. They are not careless. They are sombre, they are sane, they are pre-eminently practical. What they grip, they hold. When not deployed in the field their personas are icy, untouchable and ironic, but they can when necessary adopt any passion.

It's not surprising, then, that it may be the House which exercises the greatest real power. Neither the newest of the Newbloods (sparsely peopled with wilful eccentrics) nor one of the older Houses (numerous and indistinguishable in their outlook), but a House of moderate size and relatively recent history, it's nevertheless gained an enviable reputation for eminence. Critics of Dvora remember it as the House which gave birth to the Imperator Presidency, but most feel it's to the credit of Dvora that having been associated with one ill-conceived attempt to confront the Spiral Politic on a military footing, it never shied away from the necessity of using force in later years. Nine-hundred years before the War, when a sullen, joyless pacifism was as much regulation as the old academician's robes of the Homeworld, Dvora had already begun a policy of both covert and overt "sallies" against certain threatening pre-time-active cultures. These weren't the later butcheries attributed to House Mirraflex or the megalomaniac purges of the intervention groups, but masterpieces of strategic and logistical minimalism. And when the enemy finally manifested itself in the last years before the War, it was Dvora who understood its reasoning better than any other bloodline. (It's worth noting that after the initial military contact between the Homeworld and the outside universe during the Imperator Presidency, Dvora was regarded

as the first of the Newblood Houses, although it's far more stable than many of the War Era lines which bear the "Newblood" name.)

While asleep in Italy, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley envisioned the lines which would form part of his work *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), in an act of dream-composition of a kind usually associated with Coleridge. Though Shelley himself would later nervously deny it, the name of Murder in his dream was not the ill-fated Viscount Castlereagh (who would die in 1822, ostensibly by his own hand and in circumstances thought to be connected to the machinations of Britain's Star Chamber) but the apparently meaningless name of Dvora:

'I met Murder on the way –

He had a mask like Dvora –

Very smooth he looked, yet grim;

Seven blood-hounds followed him…'

Shelley adapted the lines to his own political ends, but it's of interest because it suggests that the animalistic nature of the House had even pervaded the consciousness of a sleeping poet who possessed only the slightest understanding of the Houses' existence[2]. We can discount the suggestion that Shelley heard the name from a careless House Dvora agent, but it's a singular coincidence that Dvora maintains a cadre of seven elite operatives.

***FATHER-TWICE-REMOVED* DYAVOL [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Early War Era)*]** Recruited by Faction Paradox during the heyday of the Cult of Celebrity Death, Father Dyavol was a Russian peasant with alleged spiritual powers and a talent for turning his dislike of hygiene into something approaching a religious observance. His death made him a legend, with myths circulating that he'd escaped his bizarre assassination three times over, or that he'd been spirited away into the new Soviet secret science departments.

He first came into contact with his "spirits" during his earlier wanderings around Russia, quite possibly during a visionary state brought on by his involvement with the heretical, self-flagellating *Khlysty* sect. Faction records suggest that he wasn't recruited until much later, mere days before he was lured to his death in Petrograd. In the intervening years he became an intimate of the Tsarina, who relied on him for advice on both state and spiritual matters: and of her children, including the young Anastasia. Due to the unseemly influence he held over the Romanovs, some of the lesser members of the imperial bloodlines eventually agreed to assassinate him, luring him to his death in one of the conspirators' own cellar.

[[▲ FATHER DYAVOL, in pensive mood.]]

It was at this point that Dyavol seemed to become calm, preparing for the meeting which would result in his death with equanimity. How could a

seer, a mystic with such powers as he was alleged to possess, not be aware that the young noblemen had invited him to his death in a basement? Why did he show no signs of premonition? The answer is that he was no longer there: the man who was poisoned, shot, bludgeoned and finally drowned was not the true Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin but a biomass dummy put in his place two days previously. The real Dyavol was already in the Eleven-Day Empire, undergoing his full initiation.

This "faked death" strategy is, of course, exactly the kind of thing which observers who know very little about the War like to imagine is going on all the time. This is largely why the practice was discontinued, and why the Cult of Celebrity Death ultimately fell out of favour.

But Dyavol rose rapidly through the ranks of the Faction, using the skills honed in imperial Russia to gain himself access to, and the patronage of, powerful leaders within the Eleven-Day Empire. His preferred method of communing with the *loa* – the Faction's own "spirits" – remained the *Khlysty* rites of purging which he'd practised in the motherland and, just as before, he was able to find a supply of ready females willing to help him with his quest to expel sin through sinning. He continued to believe that should the soul become purified enough, the spirit of the saviour would be reincarnated in the believer's body, but once under the influence of the Faction he soon went from attempting to become the vessel of Christ to attempting to become the vessel of the Grandfather of House Paradox.

Would he have achieved this aim, had he stayed with the Eleven-Day Empire? It's uncertain: it seems more likely that the Grandfather would have been rather annoyed at being re-embodied. It will never be known, however, as a new initiate caused Dyavol to abandon the Eleven-Day Empire altogether.

When Anastasia first arrived she was delighted to see "Our Friend", as her family had called Dyavol. It may be that he was, in fact, the person who convinced the waning Cult of Celebrity Death to let her join Faction Paradox in the first place. By the time of her initiation he'd become a Father, respected for his ability to influence people despite his refusal to wash several areas of his body, and once she was fully indoctrinated he quickly brought her under his patronage. When she began to talk of

revolution, he encouraged her, and he might well have helped to inspire her entry into the House of Lords. He was able to convince many of their fellow Russians to join them when the time came to leave for St. Petersburg and found the breakaway Thirteen-Day Republic.

Once back in the Winter Palace which he'd once held in his thrall – albeit a ghost version of that Palace, within the Republic's own private bubble-universe – he set about re-embodying the Grandfather above all other tasks. He gave Anastasia advice based on his visionary trances, encouraging her to embrace the *Khlysty* rites herself. He would also leave the Palace, wandering the streets in a daze or going out into the wastelands, beyond which he would claim to be battling the Devil itself. He would return, exhausted and pale, with new instructions on how Anastasia should conduct her own personal war.

His wanderings became longer and less explained, leaving Anastasia alone and terrified in the Malachite Room at the Republic's heart, unwilling to act without his advice. Two days before the battle of Valentine's Day caused the fall of the Republic, he went to resume his wanderings. His body was later found beneath the ice on the frozen river: he'd been poisoned, his throat had been slit and finally he'd been drowned. The method suggests he was a sacrifice to the "spirits", recalling the three-fold deaths common in such sacrifices, but it's unclear whether he was a willing participant or not. It might be that he believed he had to undergo this in order to be resurrected as Grandfather Paradox, or that some members of the Thirteen-Day Republic thought the wild spirits of Russia were demanding his death.

It's even possible that Anastasia herself may have ordered his killing, desperate as she was to keep the Republic safe.

EARTH: *HISTORY* [*Lesser Species: Location (World)*] For obvious reasons this current volume is largely concerned with the War's various intersections with Earth, although the reader shouldn't take this prejudice at face value: whether the history of Earth (and, more crucially, the history of humanity) is genuinely of special interest to the Houses is a matter for debate. It's true that Faction Paradox has a certain sympathy with the world's human bloodlines, hence the existence of the Remote, but overall it may be truer to say that humans are simply more inclined to *notice* other humans in the ranks of the War-time powers.

The history of Earth is mutable, like most of the War Era universe, and filled with points of catastrophe during which events could easily have tipped the world into obliteration, stasis, or even retro-erasure. But out of all the potential or alternative destructions of the Earth, a single definitive destruction event can be identified. This occurred – or occurs – some ten-million years beyond the start of industrial age, when the planet was lost to the inevitable supernova of its own sun. By this time the human species had spread across and beyond its galaxy, and was arguably the most active, though not the dominant, species in the Spiral Politic.

The destruction of the human homeworld had a profound effect on every society which originated there. The one common reference point of human culture and history was effectively removed, and although it had never been easy to imagine humanity as a cohesive whole (by this point there were far too many colonies, migrations and subspecies throughout the Spiral Politic) it was now simply impossible, not to mention pointless. Thus was created the loose political structure known as the posthuman hegemony, and thus began the great era of posthumanity. It's this vast and now-unpredictable spread of human-descended cultures which currently concerns the Great Houses, and in that sense it could be said that the true importance of Earth lies not in its history but in its fall.

Nonetheless, a chronology of Earth history has been provided to give some sense of historical context. This timeline covers the crucial window between the world's first intersection with the War and the "ghost point" of the early twenty-first century, beyond which humanity' moves into its expansionist era and the history of Earth itself loses any real meaning.

Earth Chronology (1431 to 2001 AD)

Although the first proven contact with the War Era powers took place during the fifteenth century, non-local elements were present far earlier. A Mal'akh colony is thought to have existed on the African continent for thousands (possibly millions) of years prior to the 1400s, and it seems likely that the Pre-War Houses at least carried out reconnaissance, most likely influencing the Grand Families in Europe.

***1431*:** The Order of the Dragon (Eastern Europe) begins its purges against the Islamic Ottoman Empire. An exclusive order of knighthood, its leading figures already familiar with the Mal'akh, it's the Order's penchant for ritual which will eventually establish a connection between Earth and the War.

***1447*:** The rise of Vlad III. The mass-slaughter carried out by Vlad at Tirgoviste, partly inspired by the Order, inadvertently summons the Celestis to Earth for the first time. The Celestis will continue recruiting servants in Eastern Europe for centuries to come.

***1641*:** Establishment of the Star Chamber as a similarly exclusive order in *western* Europe, headed by the Grand Families and dedicating itself to the preservation of the human bloodlines.

***1752*:** With the world entering its industrial, time-aware era, Faction Paradox makes its first formal embassy. The Gregorian Compact is signed, founding the Eleven-Day Empire and forging a permanent link between Earth and the War-time powers. As a result of the Protocols of Linearity agents of the Houses find it difficult to penetrate Earth's causality for the next seventy years. The Star Chamber, meanwhile, becomes convinced that the Faction is its sworn enemy.

***1782*:** Though Faction Paradox is unable to directly place agents in this era, Cousin Belial arranges to have himself reborn in the eighteenth century and live through the coming decades in linear time. Some data is therefore gathered from the period.

***1789*:** The French Revolution, a prelude to the Napoleonic era which will see the Star Chamber suffer some of its worst casualties. The Mal'akh are

also on the rise.

***c. 1805*:** The Faction's interference in the North American warrior tribes is under way, thanks to information from Cousin Belial.

***1822*:** The Gregorian Compact expires. Earth is once again open to the major powers, but with the Mal'akh and the Star Chamber still active the result is an age of confusion, collaboration and counterespionage. The Faction itself has links to the Shelley Cabal in this period.

***1834*:** The Star Chamber makes its move against its "great enemy", using the analytical engine to gain a bridgehead inside the Eleven-Day Empire. The organisation begins to wane after the failure of the attack, and the focus of human affairs starts to shift away from Europe and towards the Americas (not to mention the Far East). With none of the powers maintaining full-time embassies, from this point on there's no linear connection between Earth and the War at all.

***1845*:** The Karachi incident. It's the last notable Mal'akh encounter of the era.

***c. 1850*:** With the Faction's interests in decline, the major Earth-based powerbase is the Gauntlet, the House Military academy at the future site of Kobe. The enemy is also thought to have a presence in the area. In America, the Houses are subverting the Faction's Remote operations via the open doors.

***1864*:** Faction Paradox severs its last connection to the era of the Star Chamber with the assassination of John Hanning Speke.

***1875*:** The age of North American (proto-Remote) warriors like Pai'ngya. An ageing Cousin Belial continues to report to the Faction, although with other concerns on its mind the Faction isn't paying a great deal of attention to its American projects.

***1888*:** Wovoka becomes the last of the North American Messiahs, the Faction's operations all but forgotten. However, descendants of its nineteenth century Remote followers remain in the western states of America and will soon pass on its lore to their descendants.

***1916*:** The future Father Dyavol is initiated into Faction Paradox as Russia enters its Revolutionary period. As a result of the fiasco surrounding his recruitment, the Celestis cease to have any interest in Eastern Europe.

***1925*:** The Russian Revolutionary ethic is ritually captured on film by Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* as the cinema age begins. The Remote descendants in America form Hollywood's North Los Angeles Cabal.

***1939*:** Outbreak of World War Two, just as the Hollywood Cabal reaches its zenith. From 1940 to 1945 the Star Chamber makes its last ever stand, although for some reason their folio relating to the era (the sardonically-named "Churchill Index") remains impossible to find.

***c. 1950*:** By this point the House Military is treating Earth as if it were any other War-time bridgehead world, and it's thought in some quarters that the operations of the Seventh Wave may well be connected to the later stagnant period of human culture.

***1977*:** Michael Brookhaven becomes the leading light in the former North Los Angeles Cabal. Under his regime it's generally known as Faction Hollywood. His reckless use of time-technology ensures that he'll be the last significant head of the group.

***1999*:** Brookhaven's fall, after the intervention in California of the House Military agent Christopher Rodomonte Cwej.

***2001*:** Beginning of the "ghost point" era of humanity.

***THE* EDIMMU [*Lesser Species*: *Group (Mal'akh)*]** Sometimes called *ekimmu*. Name given in Assyrian and Babylonian mythology to the 'Council of Seven': immortal spirits of 'giant strength and giant tread', created by the intermarriage of humans and the spirit world, described as being 'full of violence'. They 'rage against mankind' and 'spill their blood like rain, devouring their flesh and sucking their veins'. The council is often said to be the guiding force behind the Mal'akh presence on Earth, and is cited in the *Liber Sanguisugarum* as being the direct opponent of the human Star Chamber. Legends of these creatures date back to at least the first millennium BC, but beyond the basic knowledge of their existence little is known about them.

Certain fifteenth-century sources claim that an army of Eastern European soldiers discovered a fortress of the Edimmu at Gragov in the 1460s, but this is erroneous. Eastern Europe at that time was under constant threat from the Ottoman Turks, and any unusual phenomenon was likely to be attributed to "eastern devils". In fact, the Gragov incident was humanity's first engagement with the Celestis and had nothing to do with the Mal'akh at all.

THE ELEVEN-DAY EMPIRE [Faction Paradox: Location, Major Powerbase (World)]

'I saw a vision [of London] there. It must have been in flame, as the sky was a bloody and an awful red, though I saw no fires in any of the byways nor the docks. Against the burning of the sky the buildings were as shadows, and the Abbey at Westminster and the throne of Parliament were cenotaphs of black… and when I moved to them to take shelter, they were still black, and I knew that these were the ghosts of the buildings which had burned.'
– James Thomson III, Journals (1905).

In 1752, Britain was the most significant nation on the face of the Earth. Whether it was actually the most *powerful* is another matter, but the country was fast becoming a model of the modern state during the Age of Reason. Business was booming, with a little help from the slave trade and the rise of the East India Company; English had become the prime language of that newest of art forms, the *popular* novel; great things were expected of the colonies in America; a glorious new age of machinery and mass-production was on the way (it's surely no coincidence that the symbolic pocket-watch used by the Great Houses when they created the first babels was made in northern England during this era); and most importantly of all, the culture was on the cusp of becoming time-aware – of being able to think of time as a *thing*, as a definite *continuum* – thus setting in motion the events which would, in the distant future, result in posthumanity developing time-technology of its own.

And yet there was a flaw in this grand new age of "British time": the calendar. In 1752 Britain still used the old Julian calendar, which had already been abandoned in the Papal states and which was now known to be eleven days out of synch with the more modern, and more accurate, Gregorian version. The decision was therefore made that in September 1752 the entire country would change from the old dating system to the new, which meant, of necessity, removing eleven days from the calendar. The nation would go to bed as usual on the night of the 2nd of September, and when it woke up the next day it would be the 14th.

The country wasn't quite time-aware yet, however. There were riots on the streets of London, many of the locals believing that if eleven days vanished

from the calendar then they'd literally lose eleven days from their lives. In their view of things God had decided a day of death for every man and woman alive, and no government had the right to bring that day forward. *Where*, they asked, *will this time go? What will happen to all the minutes and hours and days, once they've been stolen from us?*

In fact, this was a very good question. The truth is that the "missing" eleven days were obtained from George II by the Grandfather of House Paradox.

It should be remembered that when the Great Houses designed the framework of history, they also set certain limitations on time, and its usage. They didn't *create* time, as such, but they *structured* it, setting out a fixed relationship between history and sentient life which would become the basis for all later temporal science. Yet the Grandfather maintained that it was possible to use the same House procedures which had been "formatted" time to "re-format" it, creating new, dynamic time-structures wherever they might seem necessary… or, indeed, simply interesting. The notion that the eleven days lost by the people of Britain *went* anywhere was quite obviously ridiculous, and yet it was only ridiculous because the Houses had *decided* that time didn't work that way.

It must have become clear to the Grandfather that House Paradox would require a safehouse of some description. The ruling Houses had done little to stop Paradox's alternative time-structure experiments, but the founder must surely have known that things were likely to change. Although the Eleven-Day Empire was in part just another experiment, it was also designed to give the new bloodline a bolt-hole, a sanctuary away from the Homeworld itself. Eighteenth-century Earth must have seemed the perfect place to acquire raw materials. The lost eleven days were (symbolically?) purchased from the court of George II under the terms of the Gregorian Compact, and used to construct the Eleven-Day Empire.

The Empire – and the word "Empire" was chosen with some irony – is a bubble of time existing outside the confines of both normal history and Homeworld time, a self-contained continuum eleven days from end to end. As only *Britain* lost eleven days, it's been suggested that the Empire must logically be exactly the same size and shape as Britain itself, but there's an inconsistency here. It's well-known that the Eleven-Day Empire is a

“shadow” of the country, its topography uncertain and its buildings little more than pitch-black silhouettes against a perennially red sky, but only London (the capital of the Empire, and therefore of Faction Paradox itself) is occupied. In fact, the phrase “Eleven-Day Empire” is usually used to refer only to the city, and a limited area of the city at that.

It might seem curious that such a small amount of the available alter-space is currently being used by the Faction, but two things should be considered. One: the Empire has now been in existence for over four-hundred years, despite being only eleven days across. It’s been suggested that the Faction has therefore decided to focus on the capital’s survival, “burning” extra space-time from the edges of shadow-Britain to extend the city’s lifespan (which means, logically, that the Empire must one day exhaust itself). Two: Faction Paradox relies mostly on field agents. Individual Faction cabals are spread across the Spiral Politic, while the Eleven-Day Empire is only a home to the higher ranks of the organisation, the Mothers and Fathers plus their personal attendants and students. Each of the elder members has an apartment or set of apartments inside the city, an allocation of time as well as space, and as a mere 630 members sit in the Parliament the shadow-space at the heart of London is easily large enough to contain them all. Though the Empire was originally created as a safe-haven, it’s been the chief base of operations for Faction Paradox ever since the House Military’s Second Wave began its great crusade and forced many of the Faction’s elite to withdraw from the Spiral Politic.

(It’s also been said, though less than reliably, that the areas of the Empire outside London are *inhabited* by things which have nothing to do with Faction Paradox at all, though as the Faction’s predecessors built the Empire it’s not clear how these inhabitants might have got there. It’s odd, however, that although there are no non-Faction *people* in the capital there are still ravens in the Tower of London, almost as if some of the creatures migrated from the original city to its counterpart. The only sentient “native” creatures in the city are the Unkindnesses, despite a number of folk-stories about a fabled Beast of the Hours, which is said to grow slightly larger every time the city loops at the end of its eleven-day cycle.)

It should be noted that although the street map of the Eleven-Day Empire seems to be based on the London of 1752, not all of the city’s architecture is

consistent. For example, the Mothers and Fathers sit in session in the Houses of Parliament: yet the Parliament buildings are based on the more "modern" Parliament buildings, the Parliament of the 1700s having burned down in 1834. Godfather Morlock has famously said that this is because the newer Parliament buildings 'cast longer shadows'. Yet the architectural style appears consistent, and not surprisingly: though the buildings are perfectly solid, all of them appear as *silhouette*s of the genuine articles, their details difficult to make out under the ever-present red light. There's not thought to be any direct doorway between the actual London and its Faction counterpart, although the existence in the real-world London of sites like *Fashion Paradox* might suggest that the original city is somehow aware of its twin, if only subconsciously.

When the Grandfather arranged the construction of the Eleven-Day Empire, House Paradox refused to divulge any details to the ruling Houses, it would be inaccurate to say that none of the Houses know where the Empire is – it exists outside of the normal continuum, and therefore isn't technically anywhere, in relation to anywhere else – but it's true that none of the Great Houses know how to access it, as to search for a gateway would require experimentation into alter-time structures in breach of the Protocols (the Faction's typically ritualistic view of this is that the Houses can't enter because they don't know how to communicate with the *loa* who guard the Empire's boundaries). Thus, the Eleven-Day Empire remains reasonably safe. Temporal experiments by the lesser species have occasionally transported individual travellers or machineries to the Empire by accident, but in general the capital can only be reached via the Faction's own rituals, and although the Military Wing maintains a defensive force of armed flyers inside the city a full-scale assault seems highly unlikely. The only attempted attack so far was the ill-fated Clockwork Ouroboros affair of 1834, and no repetition of it is expected. [For picture, see under Unkindnesses.]

***THE* ELEVEN-DAY EMPIRE: THE 1834 ATTACK [*Faction Paradox: Event (Earth, C19/Early War Era)*]** As the Great Houses refuse to even consider using the alter-time methods which might grant them access to the Eleven-Day Empire, the "ancestral home" of Faction Paradox has remained relatively secure for four-and-a-half centuries, so it might seem odd that the only full assault ever staged on the Empire came not only from humanity but from humanity in a relatively low-tech era. But then, the human species has never been fully primed by any of the War-time factions and is notoriously willing to use any techniques which happen to come its way. The attack is often known as the Clockwork Ouroboros affair, and involved the Star Chamber – an organisation inclined to think of itself as the righteous defender of humanity – using Babbage's analytical engine to force open a path between nineteenth-century London and the seat of the Faction.

The Ouroboros device was in place inside the London Houses of Parliament by the beginning of October 1834, and the Star Chamber's agents finally crossed the threshold between the *actual* London and the Eleven-Empire on the 15th. As the effects of the machine's calculations spread out from the Star Chamber's headquarters beneath Parliament, the Chamber's agents prepared to defend the machine, now vulnerable as it stood in both worlds at once. Known to be present were at least seven unnamed Garter Knights, Lord Howard, Ada Byron and the American del Rio. The American, however, was tasked not with guarding the machine but with gathering information. Howard's account suggests that he must have left the chamber soon afterwards, since nothing more is said of him, but since he turns up in documents dating from 1835 – 1865 before disappearing from the records of the Chamber it's assumed he escaped capture and survived.

He certainly eluded the wave of Faction operatives which attacked the chamber shortly after the threshold was breached. Howard's account states that the American wounded the leader of the Faction's forces, damaging both his armour and his headpiece. *'He limped towards us, seemingly untroubled by the blow he had been dealt, although the hideous skull that covered his face was cracked across. I thought at first it was blood that fell from the broken mask, but even in the darkness of the chamber it had a strange colour, and a sickly odour followed him, like carrion left too*

long…' The leader removed the broken helmet, to reveal the all too familiar features of Byron.

He was certainly recognised by the Chamber's agents, despite the changes he'd suffered during his ten year absence. Lord Howard's account (the only surviving version, and only partially recovered from the fire at Grindlay's Warehouse in 1861) states that he greeted his daughter Ada quite cordially, and thanked her for her assistance. The armoured agents standing with him were rather more of a shock: Lord Howard's account is a description of a nightmare in bone and flesh, under a sky of blood, worthy of the worst excesses of gothic literature.

The Faction agents attacked the engine, determined to shut it down, while Byron attempted to remove his daughter from the fray. Terrified, she fled, fortunately back to her own world and not deeper into the Eleven-Day Empire. Byron was left to help shut down the machine, but it wouldn't be stopped: the very nature of its equations had altered, and the device was now running autonomously thanks to the *canon per tonos* being used as its operating system. The Star Chamber's Garter Knights – all, one can assume, skilled ritualists and members of Britain's five Grand Families – began to drive the Faction agents from the chamber into the open air. Their goal was presumably to give the engine time to make its attack an irrevocable one. Howard remained, with one other, to stop Byron.

There are marginal notes in another hand at this point in the narrative, speculating as to why the Faction sent such a limited a response to this threat. The hand is neat, but exceptionally small, apparently that of the adventurer and ritualist Captain Richard Francis Burton. Deciphering Burton's handwriting is considered a living nightmare by his biographers, but he apparently suggests that the threshold between the "real" Parliament and the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire was unstable, and that perhaps the effects of the Clockwork Ouroboros had already done considerable damage to the immediate area (rendering it unsafe for too many operatives to attack). Rather more caustically, a footnote in the same hand suggests that the Faction simply didn't consider the threat to be significant enough to warrant greater attention.

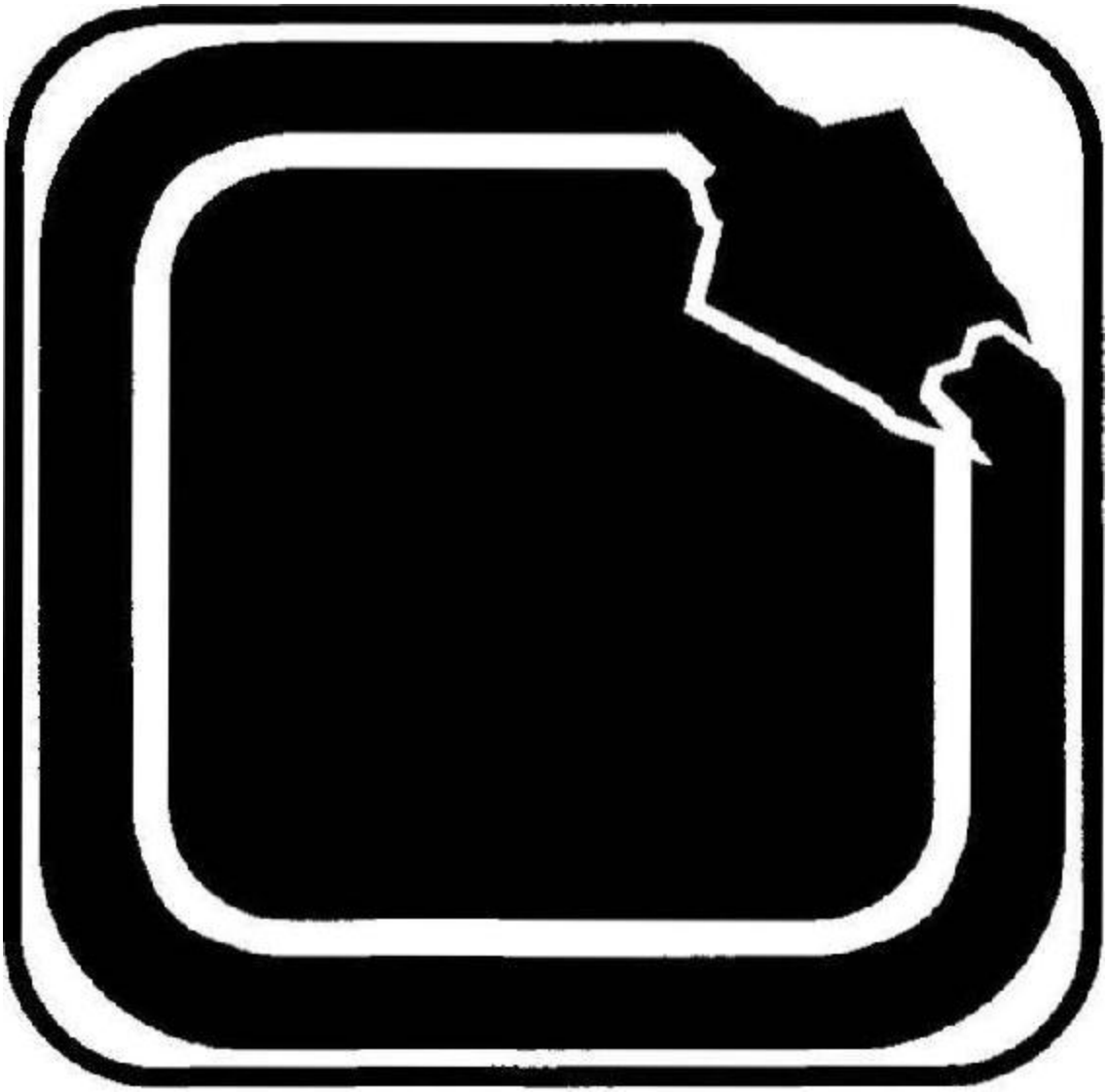
The next few pages of the account are illegible, being damaged by both fire and water, and little can be made of the sentences which remain readable. One fragment contains mention of “L.B.” and “shadow” on a single line, with the Engine mentioned on the next lire down. Did Byron somehow use his shadow to destroy the Engine, relying on one of the *sombras que corta*? Later records of his activities describe him as one of the shadowless, but it’s not unusual for the shadows of the Faction’s agents to degrade over time.

What *is* known is the aftermath: a fire which swept through London’s Parliament on the 16th of October, 1834, destroying both the House of Lords and the House of Commons, and leading to the construction of the more modern Parliament site. The Star Chamber was left in disarray, forced to dissolve the organisation into various interest groups. Far from being a major force in esoteric concerns, in Victorian times it became nothing more than the organisation it had always appeared to be to outsiders: a premier order of Knighthood, a gentleman’s club with no real agenda beyond its own fraternal society. There’s even evidence that some of those who inherited the Chamber’s lore were later neutralised by the ghost cluster devices of the Great Houses.

The Clockwork Ouroboros survived at least in part, and in later years provided the Faction with some amusing toys based on its principles. Not least of these were “music boxes” which used parts of Bach’s themes, capable of creating localised time distortions, delusions and a host of small but useful effects depending upon the musical theme employed. Perhaps the most amusing use to which they were put was in the constant harassment of Charles Babbage by street musicians playing their hurdy-gurdies outside his window. Younger Faction agents tormented the man for years for his role in the events of 1834, driving him almost to distraction with variants of his own creation.

THE ENEMY [*Terminology*]

'Some people have to go straight to the ending before they even understand the beginning.'
– House Strategist Entarodora.



[[▲ THE ENEMY.]]

Those "lesser species" involved in the War often find the whole conflict difficult to understand, for the simple reason that the two principal Warring sides seem so badly-defined. On one side are the Great Houses, who might be considered the truly *conservative* forces of creation,

occupying a position outside of normal time and attempting to maintain a status quo which has existed since the beginning of the Spiral Politic itself. But on the other side… who? Many observers find it strange that the Houses themselves don't refer to their enemy by name, generally just using the term "enemy" and expecting everybody else to take the meaning as read. Indeed, the Houses themselves have only recently begun to understand what the term actually *means*, and it wasn't until the debacle of the Faraway Declaration (only thirty-five years before the beginning of the War) that they even formally acknowledged the existence of a rival power.

Contrary to popular folklore, this isn't because the Houses' agents have a superstitious fear of mentioning the name and nor is it because the enemy has wiped its name from history altogether, although that does seem a viable War tactic and the enemy is known to retro-erase crucial information about its methods when necessary. In truth the Great Houses do have a name for the opposition, but it's rarely used because… it's simply inadequate. The enemy isn't a single species, or even a distinct political faction. Though it has a leader – or at least a "head", or a "founder" – to focus on the leader would be pointless. The enemy is a *process*. To understand the enemy it's necessary to understand how that process works, and a simple one-word name would only encourage the Houses to concentrate on the much less important details of, say, the enemy's physical appearance (they can barely grasp their opponents' operating principles at the best of times). To put it simply: the important thing isn't who the enemy is, but *why* it is.

To fully understand the nature of the enemy, it's vital to understand the context in which it exists. See also the Churchill Index; Immaculata Formosii; the Gods of the Ainu; "Miss Hiroshima"; Mohandassa; Sixth Wave Defections; S'tanim; and Violent Unknown Events.

***HOUSE STRATEGIST* ENTARODORA [*House Military: Participant (Present)*]** Strategist of House Arpexia, and one of the first to suggest that the War would end in one of two possible ways: either in a victory (for either side) so inexorable that it would not only live in history but *become* history, or in the War being retroactively annulled (by a losing side seeking to avert defeat, or a winning side seeking a more successful rematch). In her view, a universe in which a time-active war is fought becomes an entwined series of collapsing temporal loops, or *fugues*, as the time-active powers adopt first simple and then complex tactics to exploit their four-dimensional supply lines. A simple tactic, for example, would be planning to fight a battle at time t, and then before committing troops consulting the records of time t+n to determine whether it was successful. A slightly more complex tactic is faking records of the battle at time t+n in order to force the enemy to commit forces at t (t being, say, the locus of a large and terminal catastrophic event).

In modern times Entarodora is best known as the author of the "Monsters" Coda, but she's also particularly renowned for second-guessing the work of others, most notably during her involvement in House Arpexia's Earth-bound Jungle Children project. While this kind of after-the-fact analysis could imply a second- or even third-rate mind, in her case it's more likely that it demonstrates a tremendous desire for control, coupled with an instinct for having the last word. [For picture, see under House Military.

EREMITES [*Great Houses: Group (Pre-War Era)*] It's unquestionably true that the first great Diaspora – when the foundation of modern House society led to the extermination of the most ancient bloodlines, the rise of others, the ascension of the timeships and the "War in Heaven" against the Yssgaroth – was largely driven by fear. Many believed that the Homeworld itself would soon fall (fears resurrected ten-million years later, in the *current* War Era), and a new kind of social history was forged as refugees and dying bloodlines fled the Homeworld to cut a path through the outside universe, a universe which many soon found to be far more barbaric than the sealed enclave they'd left.

But at the same time, some parts of the Diaspora were motivated by political reasons as much as terror. The largest single group to leave the Homeworld at this time was the Eremites, sometimes referred to as a House in its own right (usually by its apologists). Though the name is linked to the word "hermit", the Eremites left *en masse* and, if third-hand histories written by their adherents are to be believed, remained together as a tightly-knit community long after the original generation of Diasporans had withered and died. They took with them a breeding-engine and a crude but undeniably effective labyrinth, developed by sciences which pre-dated the anchoring of the thread. It must have pained them to have to take reproductive machinery from the Homeworld, which they regarded as a "diseased tree bearing weak tasteless fruit", but even at that stage organic reproduction was an impossibility. And it's clear they never would have taken one of the Houses' newly-engineered timeships. The Eremites were rejectionists, despising the new culture of the Great Houses, and in this early primitive movement it's easy to see the first true renegades.

The Eremites rejected, completely and unequivocally, every innovation brought to the Homeworld by the Houses' new engineers of history. They saw in the rise of the ruling Houses a cult of utter sterility. It's a mistake to categorise them as reactionaries, as it seems many Eremites were drawn from the ranks of radical politics. The future they'd envisaged had simply been snatched from them by the first official head of the Presidency. In their histories and songs they name him Urizen the Architect, while in Eremite art he appears as the symbol of House rule, a blind old man with

an idiot's spittle on his lips who measures his own dung with a set of dividers. The Eremites constructed elaborate and ironic rites of worship to this drooling god: they often took vows of silence, but during the rites of Urizen they were permitted to laugh, and freely.

The grotesque parody found in the Eremites' rituals has led many to draw parallels between the Eremite movement and newer renegade organisations like Faction Paradox, but although they seem to have many symbols in common the truth is that the two groups would have very little to talk about. [See Faction Precursors.]

FACTION HOLLYWOOD [*Remote: Group (Earth, C20-21)*] Though Faction Hollywood has existed in some form since 1925, the name – simple, direct and very nearly marketable – has never been officially recognised and only came into use as recently as the 1980s, when the Hollywood cabal of Faction Paradox fell under the jurisdiction of Michael Brookhaven. Brookhaven did more to promote the cult of the "single striking image" (as opposed to the more old-fashioned approach of the "underlying theme") than any other individual of the Reaganite era, and while the Faction's older American agents had formed a cabal so nebulous that it existed more as a subliminal image than a formal organisation, it was during the Brookhaven years that the concept emerged of Faction Paradox as a *brand*.

Yet in truth the main body of Faction Paradox had little or no contact with its Hollywood cell after the mid-1940s, and for that reason Faction Hollywood is considered to be a Remote "spin-off" rather than a wing of the Faction proper. In Brookhaven's philosophy, the Faction Paradox name was a franchise and he'd acquired the right to use it as he'd acquire the rights to any other conceptual property. Five of his eighteen film projects were inspired by novels, and he took as many liberties with the source material as he did with the Faction's methodology. Historically Faction Hollywood is most noted for the "conceptual territories" it produced and stage-managed on the fringes of the US entertainment industry; its over-literal use of Production Hell; the creation of such iconic presences as the Fat, upon which much of modern cinema culture is based; and the world's longest unfinished film, James Whales' *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood*, in production since 1936.

But in modern terms the group is best-known for its cosmetic ritual, its procedures having been slowly absorbed into Hollywood (and indeed, Californian) culture over the span of several decades. A good example is the *bargain of the mask*, a tradition revived by Brookhaven in 1989 and still maintained by the Linecross company, a ritual practice with no purpose other than to establish those who oversee the rite as the brokers of all symbolic power in film society. Under the terms of the bargain, any rising male actor can "purchase" – without any apparent need for inconvenient plastic surgery – the largest, most virile, most potent phallus in Hollywood. The proviso is that the actor pays the price, to damn himself to a career in

which his most famous films are those in which he only appears masked and unrecognisable. The most notable actor known to have made this bargain was the late Darry McEwan, whose personal characteristics were proverbial in Los Angeles high society and whose role as the sardonic, scientifically-minded ape-man Hermes in 1968's *Kingdom of Beasts* (plus its sequels, *Beyond the Kingdom of Beasts* and *Judgement on the Kingdom of Beasts*) concealed everything but his eyes.

When a "name" in Hollywood makes a decision which will condemn him to be known forever as a monster, or as a disguised hero, it may still be assumed that he's bargained for private advantages with either Faction Hollywood or – more likely – one of the major studios which have been officially licensed to carry on its many rite-traditions. Faction Hollywood is like any other franchise. With its *actual* influence flagging since Brookhaven's last project *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom* in 1999, it now largely supports itself by selling its name and methods to the real major players of the industry.

FACTION PARADOX [*Major Power*]

'First off, imagine… just for a second… that everything's being run by a bunch of stuck-up immortals who live in the middle of history. Then imagine that some of them started getting itchy and got themselves kicked out. Then imagine that the ones who got kicked out are now having a kind of New Orleans voodoo-carnival across the rest of the universe, only killing anyone who gets in their way. Are you following this?'
– Cousin Eliza, Faction Paradox Military Wing.

So much of Faction Paradox's true heritage is obscured by ritual, re-written protocol and (by its agents' own admission) just sheer *posturing* those who've written about the group have often tended to miss the point. It's undeniably true that the Faction can safely be considered a kind of criminal organisation, responsible for causing – or at least provoking – massive bloodshed across the Spiral Politic. It's true that in many ways the Faction operates as a form of "cult", that its elder members certainly aren't above re-conditioning or biologically adapting the lesser species in the name of recruitment, and that the group has links to underworld or even terrorist cabals in every important civilisation from the Homeworld of the Great Houses itself to the "frontier in time" of the posthuman era.

But it's *also* true that the Faction doesn't seem to do these things for the sake of power, or out of any inherent sense of sadism. It seems to do them because it wants to make a point. Because the universe would seem to be lacking if *nobody* did it. Because, quite simply, it's a carnival. And even the very word "carnival", with its overtones of death, flesh and pointless ceremony, would on the Homeworld suggest something so disgusting that only the outcaste would consider it.

[[▲ Godfather Morlock, current head of bio-research inside FACTION PARADOX.]]

To understand Faction Paradox it has to be remembered that the Faction is itself one of the Great Houses, and its ancestry dates back at least as far as the foundation of the Spiral Politic. Yet it remains a pariah among the Houses, a role which the Faction undoubtedly enjoys. It remains, to this date, the only House to have been both outlawed and exiled from the Homeworld itself (although the Celestis came close). And yet in its early days, when it was first established as a bloodline-cum-political-organisation, Faction Paradox's exploits seem to have been relatively harmless. It broke the Protocols of the Great Houses, certainly, frequently experimenting with alter-time systems and wearing regalia generally regarded to be in *painfully bad taste*, but compared to the things the Houses themselves have done during the War Era (the extermination of entire world-cultures, for example) or even the recent activities of the Faction itself, the group's early "works" seem trivial. Only by understanding the desperate, paranoid ethos of the ruling Houses can the Faction's fall from grace be properly understood.

Five-hundred years before the outbreak of the War, the Homeworld was in a genuinely unsettling position for the first time since the founding of the ruling Houses. The Houses thrive on status quo – many had seen no real *change* to their hierarchies in literal aeons – and yet there was without doubt a growing sense of anxiety, of dissent, of change in that era. In retrospect, it's possible this was a retro-reaction to the War itself: the Houses are linked to the structure of history at the most basic biological level, so *some* premonition of the War to come must have been felt on the Homeworld. Following the rise and fall of the disastrous Imperator Presidency, it was impossible for the ruling Houses to escape the feeling that there was a whole universe out there and that they should involve themselves with it before it involved itself with *them*.

It was in this climate that House Paradox was born. To create a new "family" smacked of bio-diversity, of actual *childbirth*, and the Houses had theoretically rid themselves of such distasteful impulses. So when a member of one of the older (and admittedly slightly more erratic) bloodlines went before the ruling Houses to announce the founding of a new line, it was as if part of the old aristocracy had suddenly decided to do the most tasteless thing imaginable. And if that weren't bad enough, then the name of the new House – House Paradox – was a *shock*, in a sense of

the word “shock” which members of the lesser species can never fully understand.

It’s worth pausing here to consider the culture, the methods and the ritual of the modern Faction Paradox. The primitive death-symbols, the skulls, the bones, the “fetishes” and the totems have been seen by some as either rather melodramatic and childish or – perhaps more accurately – as almost *parade-like*, suggestive of certain “Day of the Dead” rebirth ceremonies familiar to much of the Spiral Politic. But at the time House Paradox was founded, nobody on the Homeworld other than a few (rather vulgar) academicians had seen a skull in several thousand years. As the Houses thought of themselves as things of history rather than products of raw biology, the notion of what might be *under* their skins hardly seemed important. It’s doubtful that the founder-Grandfather of the new House first appeared before the ruling Houses dressed in the now-standard Paradox suit of ceremonial armour, as Faction lore claims, but if that was the case then it’s tempting to think the old, creaking representatives of the ancient bloodlines might not even have recognised the skeleton-suit for what it was. (Even the name "Grandfather” must have been a surprise. Though it was technically the traditional term for the founder of a House, the word, like most words connected with biological reproduction, had been abandoned in polite conversation ten-million years earlier.)

[[▲ FACTION PARADOX]]

There was unquestionably an element of pure macabre malice in the Grandfather's attitude, an element which the Faction retains to this day. The Houses believed themselves to be immortal: therefore, House Paradox dressed itself up as death. The Houses believed themselves sterile: therefore, House Paradox gave its own members pre-regenerative titles like "Cousin", "Mother" and "Father". The Houses believed it was their place to defend history: therefore, the new House embraced *paradox*. When the Grandfather presented this new order to the Homeworld's elite, it was found so appalling that the ruling Houses had no idea how to react and let the matter slip noisily by. But when House Paradox began actively,

blatantly experimenting with alternative time dynamics… this was a violation of history, and therefore a violation of the Houses' own flesh and blood.

When House Paradox left the Homeworld and became *Faction* Paradox – a more political name, suggesting a wish to become involved in the politics of the outside universe – it continued to commit indiscretions just for indiscretion's sake, and perhaps because it knew how easily it could irritate the stone-faced rulers of the Homeworld. A small bloodline by its very nature, Faction Paradox became the first "cuckoo-House," not breeding its own new members but instead recruiting them from the lesser species and theoretically granting them equal status with the children of the Houses. But in just the same way that War anxiety has turned the main Houses into hardened and often murderous autocrats, the War has made Faction Paradox a far tougher kind of organisation than it once was.

With the Grandfather no longer in existence to lead it, the group has become a political-criminal organisation spanning the Spiral Politic, and though it retains its sense of the macabre and the absurd it's also discovered the importance of ruthlessness. It has "cabals" in hundreds of locations, agents (some from the lesser species, some not) on hundreds of worlds, and no compunction at all about stirring up even greater trouble between the Houses and the Houses' War-time enemy. If the two chief Warring sides are the major power-blocs of the universe, then Faction Paradox can be thought of as the subtle, well-connected guerrilla organisation guaranteed to be waiting in the wings, ready to pick over the remains once the larger forces have decimated each other. Despite constant stories that the Faction is preparing to launch a crusade against all other powers in the Spiral Politic, in truth it has no real armies and no real home other than the somewhat ironically-named Eleven-Day Empire. Though there was a period in the early War Era when it had thoughts of raising a military force in the form of the Remote, the House Military's genocidal Second Wave damaged the Faction's powerbase to such a degree that it's now become a much more patient and calculating organisation.

It does, however, have ritual on its side. The word most often used to describe Faction Paradox is *voodoo*, and the word might be well-chosen. In human terms the original voodoo-cults of the Caribbean emerged in

environments where death and corruption were inescapable, and chose their symbols to horrify and intimidate the opposition. Likewise, the Faction holds its political framework together through intense ritual and through macabre, and occasionally bloody, symbolism. Whereas the official Protocols describe the workings of history as a series of equations, Faction Paradox regards them as *entities*, treating the processes of time as if they were *loa*. Its ceremonies are designed to directly address these great invisible presences, and whether they really exist or not hardly seems to be an issue.

(Notably, early voodoo-cults are also structured as "families" with Grandfather-like spirits at the top of the hierarchy. This has led to speculation as to whether Faction Paradox and the cults of Earth are in fact related, although it seems doubtful. But it may have been because of the "kindred spirits" on Earth that the Faction chose the eighteenth century the golden age of creative human voodoo, as its bridgehead to the human species. The Faction's commonly referred to as a 'time-travelling voodoo cult', and though this misses a lot of the Faction's subtlety it certainly isn't untrue. Cynics have often suggested that the reliance on family names is just a typical cult tactic, designed to reinforce the emotional links between the Faction's elders and their recruits, yet this doesn't seem to have been the Faction's original intention: see box.)

Today Faction Paradox continues the alter-time research begun by its Grandfather, not to mention its startling experiments into the culture and biomass of other species. After the interruption of the Second Wave atrocities, links have now been more or less restored between the Eleven-Day Empire and the Faction's cabal-cells across the Spiral Politic, and with the Great Houses now fully occupied by their War it's doubtful that they'll turn their attentions to the Faction again in the near future. The organisation has been left to carry on its work in peace… whatever that work may turn out to be.

The Faction Paradox "Family"

Little Brother/Little Sister

The lowest “rank” in the organisation. A purely transitory title, new initiates become Little Brothers or Little Sisters as soon as they’re recruited, at which point their training begins. Though these junior members may be given rudimentary weaponry they’re not encouraged to use the Faction’s techniques/rituals, although they *are* shown the basic principles by older family members (usually elder Cousins rather than the Fathers and Mothers). This stage is essentially a kind of apprenticeship, during which the Faction has the opportunity to prepare the recruit before his or her real indoctrination. However well he or she does during this period, the Little Brother or Little Sister will always be granted the provisional title of Cousin before embarking on a period of initiation: if the initiation is successful, then the new Cousin will be given the title permanently and go through the armament ritual of the *sombras que corta*. If the initiate’s performance is disappointing, however, then all links to the family will be severed.

Contrary to popular rumour, Faction Paradox does not execute those who fail the initiation, although as the initiation itself is usually performed while under fire it’s not unusual for new Cousins to be killed during the process. Those who survive but fail are simply returned to their own place and time of origin… and if their knowledge of the Faction’s methods damages local causality there, then that’s no concern of the Faction’s.

Cousin

The majority of the Faction’s agents are designated Cousins. When the Great Houses abandoned natural childbirth in favour of the artificial breeding programme, the word “Cousin” was taken to mean “anyone of the same House”, but the term’s an archaic one and for the most part only Faction Paradox still uses it.

The Cousins are the rank-and-file of the family. Every Cousin has a rudimentary training in the Faction’s techniques, and most have had their weapons bound to them as part of the initiation process. The majority of Cousins are to be found outside the Eleven-Day Empire itself, and run (or at least inhabit) the Faction’s various interests and colonies in the outside universe.

Few Cousins are actually children of the Great Houses: most are recruits from the lesser species, trained and equipped for whatever tasks the elder members of the Faction deem necessary. Should the day finally come when Faction Paradox begins its long-anticipated crusade against the other Houses, then the Cousins are expected to make up the bulk of the army, although even in the military individual strengths can still be encouraged. Within the Eleven-Day Empire itself a Godfather or Godmother will often have a small clique of Cousins in his or her employ, to act as assistants and in some cases even protégés, No official distinction exists between "ordinary" Cousins and "sponsored" Cousins, but it's generally accepted that those taken under the wing of an elder patron have a much greater chance of entering the Parliament.

Father/Mother

There are 630 seats in the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire, the vast majority of them taken up by the Fathers and Mothers. These are the true "rulers" of the organisation, although as there are so many of them it's rare for a single individual to wield a great deal of power. (It's a mistake to think of the Eleven-Day Empire as a democracy, as it's quite definitely a one-party "state", and no Mother or Father would have entered Parliament in the first place if they hadn't followed the family line.) Although every Father and Mother has a right to a seat in the Parliament, many are found outside the Eleven-Day Empire altogether: wherever the Faction has a powerbase in the outside universe, or wherever its agents are working to subvert local causality for their own ends, a Mother or Father will usually be present to oversee operations. Only very small or very well-established Faction outposts are left entirely in the hands of the Cousins.

Many of those who sit in the Parliament are children of the Great Houses rather than members of the lesser species, lured away from their own bloodlines by hook or by crook. Recruits from the Houses have a tendency to be automatically granted the title of Mother or Father rather than having to rise through the ranks, and although it's been argued that this is a form of class prejudice it's true to say that members of the Houses do have a definite biological advantage, certainly when it comes to the techniques of time-control.

Of course, seats in the Parliament don't become vacant often. Thanks to surgical and chemical enhancement, Fathers and Mothers have a tendency to live for centuries, even those recruited from the lesser species. But of course, there are always accidents.

Godfather/Godmother

Faction Paradox, like any political organisation, is divided into "chapters"; there are departments, or *wings*, to deal with specific areas of concern. For example, there's a Military Wing, entirely devoted to the training of Cousins under battle conditions; a Bioresearch Wing, currently dedicated to the development and application of biodata viruses (bio-weapons which re-write the biology of a victim retroactively, thus having a mutagenic effect from the day that victim was born); while the section which handles the initiation rites of new Cousins, and oversees the binding of weaponry, is very nearly a cult in itself. The title of Godfather or Godmother is granted to the head of any such department.

Unlike the Fathers and Mothers, the Godfathers and Godmothers seldom leave the Eleven-Day Empire. Within the city there are any number of buried facilities and testing-grounds, and those Cousins trained by the Military Wing are among the few who permanently reside in the Eleven-Day Empire itself. Traditionally, one of the Godfathers or Godmothers will also perform the duty of Acting Speaker in the Parliament. The Speaker's Chair itself remains vacant, as it has done ever since the Parliament was founded, awaiting the return of the Grandfather. Not, of course, that anybody expects this to happen in the near future.

The Grandfather

The Grandfather never actually existed, and has now never actually existed for over two-hundred years. Although it's clear that *somebody* must have created the Faction, many outside the organisation are of the opinion that the Grandfather of House Paradox is, was and always will be nothing more than a myth. On the other hand, it's a maxim of the Faction that failing to exist is the best form of camouflage.

There are very few, even in the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire, who would claim to possess any real knowledge of the Grandfather. All that

remain are certain relics – the knife, for example, which was ostensibly used to remove the Grandfather's own arm in a legendary act of self-mutilation, the Act of Severance – but the provenance of these items is questionable. The name of the founder is rarely taken in vain by those members of the Faction who *do* exist, not because of religious veneration but because it's still considered possible that to speak the name too often might summon the Grandfather into being again… an inconvenience which the Grandfather probably wouldn't appreciate.

FACTION PRECURSORS [*Faction Paradox: Culture*] Though Faction Paradox is a reasonably new organisation (around four-hundred years old as a House, two-hundred in its current form), its roots seem to be buried deep in the prehistoric psyche of the Homeworld. Somewhere in the culture of the Great Houses there have *always* been bloody reminders of the Houses' biological past, and whenever such reminders rise to the surface they usually have certain primal, carnal images in common: notice, for example, the similarity between the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire and the macabre *House of Faces* created during the slaughter at House Catherion.

Some commentators have drawn tenuous comparisons between Faction Paradox and the Eremites – the first true renegades from the Homeworld – but aside from their rejection of the other Great Houses, the two groups have very few principles in common. The Eremites were a dedicated, monastic order of ascetics. They never shared the Faction's sense of *carnival*, nor its liberation ethic. Members of the Faction decorate themselves in ceremonial armour, and only draw their own blood when absolutely necessary, whereas Eremites were more likely to find expression through severe self mutilation and the abnegation of pain. Nonetheless, there are certain cultural similarities – a love of the visceral and the garish, envisaged as an antidote to the sterile, deathless culture of the Houses – which have led many to conclude that the Eremites' rituals may have been an early influence on the Faction. The Eremites don't keep written records, but there's a telling description of one of their rites transcribed in *The Little Book of Absolute Power*.

'The initiation of a new cardinal was overseen by the Black Council itself. (The Black Council parodies our own ruling House assemblies though excluding, naturally, the positions of the Presidency.) The nominate, starved over forty days and forty nights, has achieved a state of delirious, ecstatic fugue. He or she will have been bathed in bleaching acids immediately before the initiation. A corpse has been prepared in advance. I have no evidence that the Eremites kill to obtain bodies, but they are grave-robbers, without a doubt. They prize hominid corpses as the flayed skin is faintly luminous. The actual rite itself is carried out behind black velvet curtains, while the Council and cardinals lead a cycle of prayers. There is another

ritual, not performed while our agent was present, involving the extinguishing of candles […] finally the fleshed and gendered cardinal-elect emerges, sewn into the new suit of skin and leather. Suddenly the subject is a healthy shade of pink, olive or brown, though time and work will eventually rob the flesh-suit of its colour and lustre. The cardinal-elect then tells his or her story. A drum is beaten and the flag-bearers lead their procession through the spokes of their labyrinth to the centre for the investiture.' (It's ironic that in modern times, the universe-spanning labyrinth of the Eremites has taken on a different but equally "fleshy" role: it was the foundation of the time-active brothel originally run by Mrs. Foyle.)

And unlike the Faction, the Eremites had a spiritual attachment to the Homeworld. Their mythology described the great Diaspora as the "Hegira", a circular pilgrimage which would eventually return them to prominence and power among the Houses. The legends describe a "Redux" or restoration to the Homeworld, to defend and scourge it at the hour of its greatest need. In truth, any surviving Eremites may already have missed their chance.

There's a maxim that history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as comedy, then as farce. If any parallels can reasonably be drawn between the Eremites and Faction Paradox, then perhaps it could be said that the Eremites are the tragedy and the Faction the comedy. The farce has yet to come, although it could be argued that many of the Remote are already getting there.

FALLAHAL [*Remote: Location (World)*] Covert colony world, originally crypto-formed by Faction Paradox for the use of their Remote "shock troops" but now best known as the home of the Broken Remote, those Remote units which were neutralised by the Great Houses not through physical force but through a process of media infiltration described (by the Faction itself) as 'warfare by banality'. Learning from the Remote's failure during the farce on Simia-KK98, it was the Houses' strategy to hack into the Remote's all-important media systems with the aim of increasing the level of ennui in their culture, and in this they were spectacularly successful… if anything about Fallahal can be called "spectacular".

Originally the media-transmissions of the Remote on Fallahal were rapid, pro-evolutionary and above all *intense*; it was in the nature of the Remote's culture to discover, to expand, to treat any conservative elements (i.e. the Great Houses themselves) as an enemy to be defeated and surpassed. The Faction had taught the Remote about the War, but now the Houses began to subvert this "War" idea. According to the *new* cultural order, although there was still a War in progress the conflict was suddenly *internal* rather than external, a concept which eventually destroyed any impulse the Remote might have had to look beyond the limits of their own world. The important things in life, said the Great Houses, weren't "adventures" or "crusades" or high-minded movements which might take the Remote to new intellectual territories. The important things were the petty, minor details of everyday colony life, of personal problems with no significance beyond the individual, of the politics of bureaucracy and the minutiae of social standing. Anyone who thought about the world *outside* was clearly abnormal, or an idealist at best. The most valuable role one could play in this new world order was to be self-reliant and professional, and there was, said the new signals, a great and righteous glory in that kind of self-obsession.

It's impossible to understate the effect this had on Fallahal. The new culture exploited the population's most primal responses, the idea that "the self" was good and that anything "other" was evil. The implicit suggestion was that everything right with the world involved the defence of local territory, and that everything wrong came from the outside universe. Suddenly the Remote's enemies were to be terrorists rather than

reactionaries, subversives who only wanted to destabilise the now-passive, complacent society. Within a decade any aspirations the Remote may have had were almost entirely removed, the last expansionist members of the society soon converted to the cult of the inward-looking by signals like the *Jallama Reed* transmissions or the Houses' devastating New Young Gods project. The very idea of "exploration" or "saving the universe" was considered unviable, unfashionable, unprofessional or just "sad". In short, the Great Houses had made themselves safe: every evolutionary urge in the Remote's mass-psyche had been neatly removed without the application of any military force at all.

The creation of the Broken Remote, by not only encouraging banality within the culture but by encouraging the Remote to think of banality as the ideal to which they should aspire, is now regarded as one of the chief psychological victories of the War Era. Nowhere else has such a race-destroying tactic been employed with so little expenditure of resources. The Great Houses have long had the power to spectacularly collapse entire timelines or turn whole world-systems into minefields, but as the Houses believe in maintaining the status quo perhaps these weapons are intrinsically flawed in that they're altogether too interesting. At least as far as the Remote are concerned, mediocrity is a far, far deadlier weapon.

***THE* FARAWAY DECLARATION [*Great Houses: Event (Pre-War)*]** Thirty-five years before the official outbreak of the War, the Presidency of the Great Houses convened an unanticipated meeting of the ruling bloodlines, an event disseminated to every inhabitant of the Homeworld (or at least, every inhabitant to claim descent from any of the significant Houses). The Presidency of the era had once been characterised by its stoicism, but after its head had been accosted by the renegade House member later known as the War King, obstructionism had become its hallmark: perhaps terrified that the War King's predictions of the War would prove to be correct, the Presidency refused to accept that there *was* any enemy waiting in the Houses' future even after the famous Closed Session of the ruling elite. Shortly before this assembly the War King himself had been taken into custody, and many of the Houses assumed that this was the subject the head of the Presidency intended to address.

The complete speech was long, bombastic and over-confident ('my people, the Homeworld is eternal and it is strong!') yet in many ways rambling and uncertain. Its main aim seems to have been to repudiate, officially and beyond question, the existence of the "future enemy" which had fuelled so much speculation in the previous four decades. The head of the Presidency claimed that the War King himself was the 'element of fear' at the heart of House society, that this known criminal, renegade and deviant had concocted the stories of a coming horror for his own benefit. To emphasise this point the War King himself was present in the Hall of Addresses, bound to an eight-point restraining device which was as much a life-support system as a prison. It was a somewhat sadistic demonstration of the Presidency's triumph, and it must have left a few of the Houses feeling more than a little uneasy.

The head of the Presidency went on to explain that the early-universe co-ordinates given to the ruling Houses by the War King, co-ordinates of a 'far-away locale' where the enemy supposedly made its home, were known to represent an entirely barren region of the formative continuum. And this was the true crux of the declaration. The leader of the Homeworld claimed that he and his immediate cohort intended to travel directly to this point in space-time, despite its position in the proto-form days of the universe being beyond the officially-recognised range of most conventional

timeships. There, he said, he'd supervise the founding of an actual *colony:* the first such House colony in recordable history. This would prove, for all of time and all of perpetuity, the dominance of the Houses over any supposed opposition. He and his escort of (largely ceremonial) guardsmen were to return in five days, in time to make one more address before the ultimate execution of the War King.

In retrospect it's not entirely clear how the Presidency believed this gesture would settle the minds of the major Houses. The declaration spoke of 'tradition', of the Homeworld's 'unchanging' role in the Spiral Politic, yet the demonstration of this was to be the utterly unheard-of formation of a colony followed by the unthinkable spectacle of an execution. It was perhaps an act of desperation above all else. The constant references to the set-pieces of House tradition, the Protocols and the vestments of office, were enough to gain a round of applause at the end of the speech: but the applause was wary, especially with the War King watching over the chamber, his body bound, helpless and apparently crippled.

After the declaration the head of the Presidency left directly for the site of the proposed colony, as promised. The War King was left in the middle of the Hall of Addresses as per the Presidency's instructions, the Hall being left open to the public, who were given the opportunity to subject him to whatever (rather restrained) humiliations they found appropriate. Again, it's obvious even to the casual observer that this was blatantly self-defeating. By effectively advocating public torture, the Presidency seemed to be returning the world to a more brutal, visceral age rather than maintaining the status quo. It's said that representatives of the ruling Houses occasionally appeared in front of the War King during his confinement, for the most part not shaming him along with the other offspring of the Houses but instead attempting to speak to him in a conciliatory fashion. If the memoirs of various members are to be believed then they mostly apologised to him, telling him that they'd opposed the Presidency's actions, and that while they were trying to free him from his imprisonment they could find no aid among their fellow representatives. The War King, for his part, never spoke even though the machinery kept him conscious.

Strangely enough, none of the memoirs make any mention of the War King sharing the co-ordinates which the head of the Presidency had announced as his destination. Faraway, as it's now known, had never even been named until the public declaration. To this day it's unclear whether the War King had given the information to the head of the Presidency during their encounter forty-five years previously; if the head of the Presidency, gripped with insanity, had made the co-ordinates up on the spot; or if the War King had announced them during the Closed Session of the Houses, and the Houses had all simply neglected to mention them in their official minutes.

Whatever the case, nobody present seems to have found this fact odd. The Faraway mission itself was a notorious failure, although five days later it did result in the Great Houses receiving the first message from the enemy.

FASHION PARADOX, *LONDON* [*Faction Paradox: Location (Earth, C20-21)*] On New Oxford Street, sandwiched between the fantasy bookshop *This Island Earth* and the marijuana cafe *Harry Stoner and the Philosopher's Pot*, stands one of the most unlikely memorials to Faction Paradox.

If a time-aware observer could choose just one site in London where the Faction might operate, it would be the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Field, site of the notorious rookery, the first plague victims of 1664 and the fatal beer-flood of 1818. St. Giles was a *carnival* site, even when the spirit of carnival had been regulated and mutated into rituals of execution and violent death. It was home not only to the gallows of St. Giles' Circus, but also the Resurrection Gate which wiped clean the souls of the condemned. It was the breeding ground for numberless city hangmen. Nearly a century after the passing of the plague, it was in this less-than-austere area that the Gregorian Compact was signed by agents of House Paradox and agents of George II, an agreement which brought the Eleven-Day Empire into existence and bound the Faction to the capital forever.

St. Giles is no more, but in the early twenty-first century the site on which the Compact was signed is occupied by a goth, retro and fetishist, clothing store, coincidentally named *Fashion Paradox*. Mannequins of indeterminate sex gaze down sightlessly on passers-by and are, every Halloween, decorated with skull masks.

***THE* FAT [*Remote: Culture (Earth, C20)*]** There's a philosophical parable: if utopia could be established forever at the cost of the perpetual torture of a single innocent, could you live in that utopia? And there's a further parable: could you choose to be the innocent? In contemporary terms, the widescreen paradise of Hollywood is founded not on an innocent racked by machinery but on men broken on their own bodies. At the heart of its cultural landscape sits, eternally, a fat man weeping.

Not always the same man, of course. Sometimes it's Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle, his life destroyed after inflicting terminal injuries on a woman during a sexual act gone terribly, tragically wrong. Sometimes it's Orson Welles. Sometimes it's Marlon Brando. On Faction Hollywood's current shortlist for the role is Omaha Lee, star of the '90s teen movie *Cosmic Losers*, and it's said that the death of fellow teen-idol Griffin Fox (from a lethal combination of drugs in a Los Angeles nightclub, attributed either to suicide or a mercy killing by his friends) was due to his discovery that he was virtually certain to have been made the host for the Fat. It hardly matters who the current victim is, but there must be one in order for Hollywood to function. The name *does* matter, though not so much as the pain, the stifling of something grand, the sense of greatness literally weighed down by tragedy.

Each victim is trapped in an unearthly corpulence, a cancer-hybrid parasite of talent induced by the surgical executive of Faction Hollywood. Whether the greatest director or the handsomest actor of the generation, the nature of the brilliance becomes irrelevant when the Fat eats it out front the inside. As a great man becomes a self-parody, recording gravel-voiced advertisements for sherry or co-starring with an army of unconvincing animal-men in the badly-judged remake of *Kingdom of Beasts*, the culture which has grown over these "Men in Fat" – the culture which will be harvested from their corpses and fed back to studio acolytes – is the living layer of tissue that tastes of talent and genius. Its core seeds will go to be implanted in the next host, and Hollywood will devour the rest.

It's interesting to note that long before the House Military agent Christopher Rodonanté Cwej was primed by the Gauntlet to infiltrate and

destroy Faction Hollywood, his body was transformed from its trim, monastic warrior-form into something fleshy, squat, and far less virile. An armour, perhaps, against the image-destroying weapon of the Fat: to be prepared to fight against the masters of image he first had to lose his own, although if this is true then the Hollywood mission must have been planned well in advance of Cwej's briefing. Yet by the time the mission began Cwej had already found a way of returning to his former, more athletic body, his own sense of self-worth overriding his sense of duty, and as a result he may have had a disadvantage from the start.

***THE* FIRST MESSAGE FROM THE ENEMY [*Great Houses: Event (Pre-War Era)*]** When the Presidency of the Great Houses made the Faraway Declaration, thirty-five years before the outbreak of the War, the plan seemed simple. The disbelieving head of the Presidency would personally, symbolically visit the early-universe region inhabited by the Houses' supposed "future enemy", and return after five days with solid proof that the War was an impossibility and that the War King's predictions of doom were nothing but hot air. It's unsurprising, then, that when the fifth day arrived there was some excitement even among the elderly, impassive members of the Oldblood Houses. The various academicians and representatives of the ruling bloodlines soon re-assembled in the Hall of Addresses, where the Faraway Declaration had originally been made, and it remains unclear what proportion of them expected the head of the Presidency to return with the kind of good news he'd promised. The War King – more centrepiece than attendant – still hung on his metal framework in the middle of the chamber, prisoner and public spectacle. Eventually, the appointed time for the Presidency's return arrived.

And departed. For minute after minute, the ruling Houses waited for their leader to appear. In many cultures giving one's leader an extra few minutes to arrive would be commonplace, perhaps even built into the ceremony of the occasion. Among the Great Houses, however – and indeed among the majority of time-active species – such a delay was catastrophic. It was frankly unthinkable. What could possibly have caused such an interminable delay, the assembly (silently) asked itself, and what could possibly have created a crisis so great that it had brought *inexactness* the most time-aware culture in existence?

The ruling Houses received their answer in mere moments. Some in attendance would later claim to have heard the distinctive sound of one of the Homeworld's own timeships, but it wasn't a vessel which was returning.

Their leader's severed head, a slip of paper clenched in its stiffening jaw, materialised atop the podium. As one the assembled representatives started in horror, then fell silent again. No one dared move, save one man.

The War King stepped out of his restraints as though they were nothing but air. In an instant, the broken figure who'd been chained against the device of humiliation was gone, and in his place was the man who many members of the ruling Houses would come to regard as their saviour. He cautiously approached the podium, gently taking the late leader's head in his hands: then removed tin-slip of paper from between the Presidential teeth, unfolded it, and read it aloud. Every member of the major Houses heard the message, and it was then that they truly realised the danger implicit in their future.

The message consisted of four words: *'We are not amused.'*

The War King refolded the paper, placing both the note and the head back on the podium. Then he turned to the assembly and announced that he wished to speak to the ruling Houses in private.

With the exception of the heads of the ruling Houses themselves, the room was empty in under a minute. It was left to the ceremonial honour-guard to dispose of what soon became known as "the head of the Presidency", and to arrange its curious autopsy. Preparations for the War were finally beginning.

FLUXES [*Celestis: Engineered Participants/Technology*] Individuals transposed backwards in time but not too far in space, using a very high chaotic limiter setting and tied to their home period by a thread of biodata. The subject is turned loose in his or her own history, and the limiter setting allows tiny actions taken by the future version to have considerable effects on the *past* version. The biodata link then transfers these changes to the future version, which alters it, and thus alters the changes made to the past version. Therefore, the individual's history is kept constantly in flux.

At least in theory. Typically, fluxes last for only two or three cycles of change before one of two fates befall them. Either the process manages to limit itself, usually by inciting a set of circumstances which results in the death of the future version; or else accelerates to oblivion, this time by inciting a set of circumstances leading to the death of the past version. If it's the latter, then the future iteration – still tied to the changes inflicted upon its younger self – disappears, or at least becomes purely theoretical. (Faction Paradox uses a variation on this technique to manufacture its sombras que corta weapons, although as the Faction uses its own alter-time systems the things which are made intangible remain visible in shadow-form… possibly a convenience engineered by the Faction rather than a natural part of the process. It may even have been the method used by the Grandfather of House Paradox to "retire" from history altogether.)

There are suggestions of a stable middle-ground between the two fates, in which the physical matter of the flux is lost but the *meaning* of the subject/victim is retained, a series of memetic connections with no flesh to support it. Yet this entity exists only on a purely theoretical level, relying on the perceptions of others to survive at all. In theory these fluxes exist only as repeating patterns in the temporal shifts, in the same way that carbon-based beings exist only as repeating patterns in transient matter. As a result, such carefully-balanced fluxes are sometimes referred to by the medium in which they prosper: .**Shifts**

The Great Houses have singularly failed to produce any balanced fluxes of their own, and refuse to even consider "cheating" by using the alter-time systems of Faction Paradox. However, the one group from the Homeworld which has excelled at flux-engineering is the Celestis. Even Mictlan itself

can be considered a kind of enormous flux, an endlessly-shifting realm so corrosive to the rest of history that its heartland has to be kept on the outer skin of the universe. Celestis conceptual entities such as the anarchitects and the gargoyles are also dependent on flux theory.

***LORD* FOAMING SKY [*Celestis: Participant (Early War Era/City of the Saved)*]** Lord of the Celestis, at one point Most Admirable Under-Sacristan, famous for having "crossed the floor" in the Last Parliament of Mictlan on four separate occasions. His political career was unimpressive, and apart from his habit of repeatedly changing sides he's known chiefly for two remarkable distinctions: his disastrous career as Celestis Ambassador-in-Extraordinary to the City of the Saved, and his assassination, in the Celestis's own domain, by one of his indentured servants. Few scholars have attempted to suggest that the two events were unconnected.

As Ambassador to the City of the Saved, Foaming Sky took with him a worldofme device, modified so that more than one of the identical versions of himself could be at large within the City's sub-universe at one time. Thus, while the Ambassador-in-Extraordinary attended numerous state banquets and artistic premieres in his habitual "culturally sensitive" god-form of Mister Hoho, God of Evil-Gifts-from-Humans, an army of backup Lord Foaming Skies was mobilising within the City.

Foaming Sky's plan was to drive out the inhabitants from a single District of the City. The District could then be walled off and declared a protectorate of Mictlan, enabling the Celestis to upload an army of Investigators-Martial into it. Although the shedding of human blood is precluded by the City's state of grace technology, the intention was then to mount a direct assault upon the Ghetto of the Damned – a haven for those former Celestis servants who've apparently escaped their masters' influence – capturing the Ghetto's leaders and taking them back to Mictlan for interrogation. The Ambassador-in-Extraordinary was deeply unfortunate, however, in that the initial target he had selected happened to be Spinegrove District, the home of the Faction-Paradox-aligned power bloc known as the Rump Parliament. The Parliament's reaction was predictably firm, and most of the duplicate Foaming Skies were killed by members of the Order of the Iron Soul.

Foaming Sky was allowed to remain as Ambassador to the City once his worldofme had been confiscated and destroyed, but soon elected to return in disgrace to Mictlan, intending to retire to his domain for the number of centuries which tradition dictates for purging the blame from this degree

of failure. It was shortly afterwards that he became one of the very small number of the Lords of the Celestis to have suffered assassination, or rather “erasure”.

[[▲ LORD FOAMING SKY, in his aspect as Mr. Hoho.]]

The circumstances of Foaming Sky's death are remarkable: as far as Investigators could ascertain, the unfortunate Lord was dispatched by one of the dead, a human woman whom Foaming Sky had personally Marked and recorporated as a servant. Although this servant could certainly never have assaulted him if, for instance, he'd ordered her not to, it seems that some extreme form of mental conditioning had survived the Mark instructing her to kill him when given no other specific orders and when he was in a particularly vulnerable god-form (in this case Arkat, a nonhuman Puffball God). The weapon used had the effect of erasing Foaming Sky from Mictlan altogether, and rendering his own domain actively hostile to his restoration from deep backup… a method suggested by some extremist factions in the City of the Saved for enacting capital punishment within the City itself.

For such a weapon to have entered Foaming Sky's presence, it seems likely that it had been shadow-bonded to the servant according to the rituals of Faction Paradox, which would certainly throw suspicion on the Rump Parliament. Released from the Mark by Foaming Sky's death, the servant herself, one Dauphine Malacasta (orig. 2712 – 2750 AD), immediately used her newfound free will to seek sanctuary with the City of the Saved's Ambassador-in-Extraordinary in Mictlan. She is now resident with full citizenship in the City: the only citizen known to have taken the direct route to the enclave rather than being reborn there, although as a servant in Mictlan she was, of course, technically already dead.

Lord Foaming Sky's successor, the second Lord Foaming Sky, has pursued an altogether less distinguished and less complicated career.

FORCED REGEN MISSIONS [*House Military: Culture*] The need to maintain the troops of the House Military in the face of active warfare – as clumsy and fatally prone as the First Wave troops initially were – led to a breaking of the taboo on research into the so-called *nucleolingua symbiotica*, the biological language with which the bodies of House agents are persuaded to re-grow, renew and re-shape themselves while under stress conditions. It was the *nucleolingua* which had ensured both the longevity and the stasis of the Homeworld throughout previous eras, and as a result any experimentation had previously been considered a threat to the status quo in itself. Yet as understanding of these off-limits biological details grew, the higher degree of rebirth-control once exhibited only by the most refined of the Newblood Houses was made available to the humblest cohort-member, and it became possible to *force* bodily regeneration. Within a single Wave, it seemed reasonable to routinely reconstruct the bodies of troops for specific missions.

A considerable mythology, built up rapidly by the Second to Eighth Waves of House Military troops, suggested that to enter a forced regen mission was instantly suicide: that it was to throw away a life. This was of course incorrect. The missions were dangerous, certainly, by all means occasionally fatal in themselves, but they didn't use up core regenerative potential. Indeed, by the Third Wave the latest applications of the *nucleolingua* enabled quintary life-cycles of 60-plus regen capacity to become the norm. Why, then, did the troops feel the need to claim (and, it appears, fully believe) that they were being killed?

One suggestion is that considering the type of weaponry they were being asked to face, and the type of War they were being asked to fight, for the average soldier it was reassuring to imagine that he or she had lived through one death already. This was a D-Mat War. This was a War of having lost *and* of never having fought at all. It was out of this brooding, military folklore that the soldiers' Redemption Cult emerged, and although the Redemption doctrine isn't in itself linked to the tales of horror associated with forced regen missions, they nonetheless both spring from the same obsession with extinction and inescapable fatality.

***MRS.* FOYLE [*Lesser Species*: *Participant (Posthuman Period/Present)*]** She's always called herself this, but – as with anything else she says – it's impossible to tell whether she means it. Nobody can be sure that her name is Foyle or that she was ever married. There are no reliable records of her existence before the age of twenty-three. She first came to prominence in the early decadent era of posthumanity, but claims to be an unadulterated human, born in an earlier period. It's hard to know when she's telling the truth and when she's embroidering her life story for effect. Even her first name is a mystery: Rebecca and Miranda are frequent suggestions, though *Annabel* is most common of all.

Mrs. Foyle shot to notoriety as proprietress of the time active brothel known as the House of the Rising Sun. She became a celebrity to the scandal-obsessed decadents of the posthuman era, but before that she was completely unknown to the public. She seems to have worked as a filing clerk for the government of a dreary banana-monarchy world, and that's still the impression she gives people when they meet her in the flesh. She's lost more than a few prospective clients who can't believe that someone so infamous could look so ordinary. Mrs Foyle is less than 1.48 meters tall, dumpy, bespectacled, shy, hiding her face behind thick glasses and long matted strings of hair. There's a general assumption that someone as rich as she's reported to be ought to be able to afford a better body, or some shampoo. Her true worth is, of course, difficult to judge as her financial affairs have been strictly private since she first registered her business in the minor posthuman society of Friedman's World.

'It is my intention,' she wrote on her registration documents, 'to employ the loveliest and most exotic men, women and the alternatively sexed, for the pleasure of my discrete paying customers.' Friedman's World had recently legislated to decriminalise all profitable activities, and this had inadvertently extended to include prostitution as well as the expected corporate murder and slavery. Mrs Foyle wasn't the only procuress to register her business under the new regimen, though she was perhaps the least experienced. She also had the best idea. Having acquired time-technology lost by the Great Houses during the War, and used it to tap into one of the labyrinths spanning the Spiral Politic, she was able to create a brothel which could be visited on hundreds of worlds and across many

thousands of centuries. She remains the nominal director of the House of the Rising Sun but signed over her financial stake over to a close circle of employees before moving onto her new role as a procuress of killers, as director of the so-called Remonstration Bureau.

Mrs Foyle seems to have become overawed by the idea of becoming a procuress without paying attention to the practicalities of her new position. Certainly, she must have spent more time in seeking out notable *madames* of human history than in running her establishment. Apparently she was unable to make the acquaintance of Frau Schmetterling of Mirenberg nor, despite several attempts, Ma Nelson of Whitechapel. According to her diaries, she did manage to make the acquaintance of Mary Culver, the "First Scarlette Woman" of Medmenham Abbey, though the meeting left neither woman impressed. Mrs Foyle described Mistress Culver as 'Lady High Muckamuck' while Culver's journals allude to a 'mumbling vulgarian'.

Mrs Foyle unquestionably possesses knowledge which the Houses, or any of the other combatants in the War, could one day find useful. She provably knows secret ways in and out of the Eleven Day Empire. But until that day comes, the Remonstration Bureau is effectively protected from the attentions of the time-active powers by a multitude of diplomatic (and often less-than-waterproof) agreements. Mrs Foyle continues to court public controversy, heedless of any personal danger.

The looped timeline which protects the Bureau's base of operations has also permanently jammed her at the (apparent) age of twenty-eight. She's unlikely to die a natural death. [For picture, see under Posthumanity.]

GARGOYLES [*Celestis: Engineered Participants*] Single-purpose conceptual entities, which in their natural form have no material substance whatsoever and which were originally the low-grade predecessors of the anarchitects. First developed by the Celestis shortly after the construction of Mictlan, gargoyles are specifically designed to watch the outer perimeter of the Mictlan noosphere as a first line of defence against any hostile force which might threaten the Celestis's intellectual territory (or, worse, which might try to drag the Celestis back into the main body of the universe). The gargoyles inhabit the outer wall of Mictlan in the same way that larger anarchitects *inhabit* buildings: but while War Era anarchitects are engineered for a kind of subtle guerrilla warfare, the gargoyles are of limited intelligence and primed only for their task of guarding the boundary.

Generally speaking one anarchitect is capable of "possessing" a single structure, no matter how large (physical mass is an irrelevance as long as the structure's perceived as a single building), but each gargoyle only has the capability to occupy a small portion of the wall at any given time. However, every wall section is an interlocking grid of accumulator chains, field amalgams and memeotraps, spare parts made of the same alter-state superstructure as Mictlan itself. On sighting an enemy a gargoyle will instantly pull together a selection of these parts, removing them from the wall and using its limited intelligence to assemble a battle-form which seems to suit the current combat conditions. Should a gargoyle's body be damaged it can draw new material from its wall section, or even remove pieces from other gargoyles… although as gargoyles have an unfortunately well-developed sense of self – a flaw of the early anarchitect programme – this often leads to potentially brutal conflicts between the damaged gargoyle and its "donor". For all the complexity of the spare parts, once the construction fields are in place the gargoyles rely on brute force more than any other weapon.

(Naturally, none of the individual parts are critical to the gargoyle's survival. The gargoyle has no physical brain, and certainly isn't an "artificial intelligence" in the usual sense of the term. If anything it can be thought of as a complex, self-aware meme.)

Thanks to the Celestis's all-pervading obsession with the *Grand Guignol*, gargoyles have a tendency to assemble large, bulky, chimera-like forms, favouring bodies of the wings-and-claws variety even though wings and claws serve absolutely no purpose in outer-noosphere combat. On those occasions when two or more gargoyles combine all their bodily parts the results are not unlike the "stone giant" totems of many pre-time-aware cultures, although usually with a lot more arms. [For picture, see under Mictlan.]

***THE* GAUNTLET [*House Military: Location (Earth, C19)*]** House Military academy, located beneath the future site of the Japanese city of Kobe during the dawn of the Meiji period (c. 1850 AD). The temporal and geographic location proved ideal, coming on the heels of Japan's reopening to outside influences after the isolationism of the Tokugawa period. Thus the Gauntlet exists in an era when the locals routinely write off any bizarre phenomena or behaviour as simply being "western", while still providing an environment in which the hierarchies of the Shogun had yet to fade. It's suggested that not all of the ominous Black Ships which arrived with Commodore Perry in 1853 were from America. (Some historians suggest that the enemy forces also had an outpost in pre-industrial Japan. Certain remnants of the *Ainu* Japanese aboriginals in Hokkaido suggest that during the Tokugawa isolation, they hosted a reasonably powerful force which spent its time passively observing the Gauntlet.)

The Gauntlet is somewhat unusual for a military academy, training both an officer class and trooper class, though often both are created from the same bio-stock. Duelling, including the display of prominent scarring, is commonplace. It's known that at least one officer of the House Military – despite having already obtained intense training elsewhere – attended Kobe solely in the hope of gaining a permanent duelling scar, without success. It was at the Gauntlet that the Cwejen were produced, and that the original Christopher Cwej was primed for his mission to infiltrate Faction Hollywood: perhaps because of this, the scenes produced by the GCI processor for Faction Hollywood's last great creation *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom* contain several sequences which hint at an unseen, subterranean presence beneath the Japan of the Shogunate.

GCI PROCESSOR [*Remote: Technology (Earth, C20)*]Or, Genuine Concept Imagineering: the corporate name given by Faction Hollywood to the recovered meme-mine used between 1995 and 1999.

Though the meme-mines were first engineered by the Celestis, and designed to boost the Celestis's influence in areas where they were only *partly* understood and therefore partly tangible, in human terms the most significant use of the device was in California, September 1999, by Faction Hollywood's leading light Michael Brookhaven. Considering the meme-mines' ability to generate false (or *ulterior*) world-environments it could be said that Los Angeles was the perfect place for it, and Brookhaven himself may have seen the GCI processor as nothing more than an extension of the digital technology in use ever since *The Silver Mountain* in 1989.

By 1996, Hollywood was already geared towards the ritual mass-production of film, although by this point the ritual served no real purpose apart from maintaining Hollywood's role as the cultural master of the western world. Digital technology had already replaced the "prayer wheels" of earlier eras, with industrial animation departments performing billions upon billions of ceremonial calculations per day and thus keeping the *loa* of Hollywood permanently at their beck and call. Furthermore the level of satellite and cable transmission in the area ensured that every cubic inch of local air and earth was charged with the signals of past productions, the constant image-bombardment virtually becoming a kind of seance, perpetually calling on the past output of the industry and burning it into the skin of California. Hollywood had been cut off from the rest of the world not by any conspiracy of magicians, but just by the walls of broken, discarded culture which had been accumulating there ever since the 1920s.

Brookhaven's decision to use the meme-mine, a device "accidentally" discovered by Chad Vandemeer, could be interpreted as his attempt to complete the process. It was the function of the mine to enhance the ulterior worlds of the Celestis, to allow the manifestation of "ghost" places, and Brookhaven may have seen in this the potential to genuinely set Hollywood apart from the real world. It's no coincidence that the project took the title *The Ghost Kingdom* (or, in full, *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom*),

envisaged as the greatest of the hollow spectaculars. There's evidence in his later e-mail correspondence that his aim was to haunt the world, to insert his own cinematic histories into the gaps of human culture on a global scale, with Hollywood itself as the intangible, untouchable heart of his phantom empire.

Work on *The Ghost Kingdom* began in 1996, and it was to take three years for the project to reach completion. Yet remarkably, Brookhaven intended that the actual shooting of the film would be done in a single day, the 3rd of September, 1999. The prior three years were spent in pre-production, as every aspect of *Mujun* was conceived, sculpted, and programmed into the GCI processor, with Brookhaven ritually composing every shot and scene. If the hordes of artists and conceptual designers were puzzled by the three years they spent working on a project which never seemed to materialise then they must have put it down to Production Hell, and there's no reason to think anyone questioned the fact that the crew's efforts went no further than a small, shiny, landmine-like object which sat in its shrine in an office of its own.

It's impossible to judge whether the finished film was a commercial or critical success: it's proved itself immune to conventional history. But the events of the 3rd of September – the activation of the meme-mine, the intervention of the House Military agent Christopher Cwej and the ultimate fall of Brookhaven – are generally referred to, somewhat ominously, as the Hollywood Bowl shooting.

GHETTO OF THE DAMNED [*Lesser Species: Group (City of the Saved)*]
The interest taken by the Celestis in the City of the Saved has been ascribed to two factors. Firstly, the technology of the City – whereby individuals are resurrected as immortals in a pocket universe – clearly recalls that of Mictlan, the Celestis's own realm, leading to suspicions of industrial espionage. Secondly (and for the Celestis more worryingly) there's the Ghetto of the Damned, a District of the City inhabited largely by former human slaves of the Celestis. These individuals appear to be beyond the control of the Mark of Indenture placed upon them by the Celestis, to the extent that the inhabitants of the Ghetto run agents of their own to act against Mictlan's interests in the wider universe, leading many observers to the conclusion that their resurrected existence in the City occurs *later* in their personal timelines than their afterlife in Mictlan. The implication that Mictlan *itself* will at some point come to a historical end is one which few Celestis openly accept. Nevertheless the Ghetto, which is both a District and a political organisation, accounts for roughly half the former human slaves of the Celestis. Concern in Mictlan over the potential influence of the Ghetto within the City has been such that in AF 261 (by the City's calendar) a covert mission was mounted under the guise of an exchange of Ambassadors-in-Extraordinary. The City of the Saved's Ambassador to Mictlan was Amanda Legend Lefcourt: the Celestis' Ambassador to the City, Lord Foaming Sky.

During the first two centuries of its history, under the zealous leadership of Gargil Krymtorpor, the Ghetto acted primarily against the Celestis themselves. While Mictlan itself is clearly beyond the Ghetto's sphere of influence, efforts were made where possible to hire assassins to kill Celestis agents in the wider universe, and on occasion even attack Celestis outposts using mercenary armies. Under the leadership of Krymtorpor's successor Nathaniel Wain (orig. 1704 – 1752 AD), the Ghetto has widened its remit and its membership: now all humans whose original lives were altered to their detriment (or "royally shafted", as the Ghetto's current manifesto has it) by the War-time powers are free to enter. A significant portion of the membership is now made up of the human-derived Remote, and humans who served the Great Houses as modified regen-inf soldiers. The Ghetto of the Damned currently opposes all abuses of human rights by the major

time-active cultures, and its focus has become more one of political and diplomatic campaigning than of direct action.

GHOST CLUSTERS [*House Military: Technology*] Virtual, or *imaginary*, splinter bombs which model their explosions inside the predictive "model universes" of the Great Houses, marking the timelines of all those designated as affected without actually having any effect on those victims in the real world. When the pretend-fatalities – the walking dead – have reached crucial strategic points in the physical universe, the probability of the virtual bomb having been retroactively really deployed can be gradually increased. The mechanism by which this is accomplished, involving a random atomic decay counter, a time-machine and a reasonably-sized explosive device, need not be detailed here: indeed the mechanism itself is no more than a stage-prop, the effect being generated entirely by the increase in probability and not by the mechanism which delivers the actual blow.

The mere possibility of the *real* killing stroke having fallen in the victims' pasts begins to abrade their physicality. They fall ill. They become paranoid. They suffer symptoms of dislocation and disease, and many actually die. It's perhaps surprising that this example of temporal voodoo (the image/model of the victim suffers, and therefore the real victim suffers as well) was developed not by renegade Houses such as Faction Paradox but as a straightforward application of basic military war-modelling.

Even so, the walking dead's awareness that they're somehow *doomed* does tend to lead them into macabre, obsessive lifestyles, a fact perhaps best demonstrated by the nineteenth century poet James Thomson. There's been some speculation that the Grand Families of Europe were deliberately introduced to War-time lore by the Great Houses, and if true then it's possible that ghost clusters were eventually used to cover up the Houses' interference, cutting the ties between those who knew too much about House culture and the rest of the human species. Though the members of these families survived, their ability to influence the world around them grew less and less with every passing year.

GHOST SHIRTS [Remote: Technology (Earth, 09)]

'Verily, I have given yon my strength,
Says the father, says the father.
The shirt will cause you to live,
Says the father, says the father.'
– Song of Kicking Bear, as told to him by the *dakina* Blackghost.

The concept of the ghost shirt was visited upon the Lakota medicine man Kicking Bear, a member of one of the Remote-inspired North American warrior tribes and a disciple of the messiah Wovoka. He claimed that in his dream the spirit warrior Blackghost showed him how to make the shirts, sacred armour impervious to white man's bullets. These shirts, made of simple white calico (purchased from white traders, ironically enough) were constructed in traditional native fashion, sewn with gut and fringed at the seams, usually decorated with red ochre and charcoal. Blood or flesh offerings were not used in making these shirts, as Blackghost had warned that blood would call to metal (therefore bullets would be attracted rather than repelled). The specific chants used to induce a hypnotic state in the makers of the shirts are now forgotten, but the buffalo skull and the red hand were common symbols painted onto the cloth and certainly reflect similar if less primitive imagery often seen in Faction Paradox rituals. If there's any similarity between the imagery of the shirts and the more impressive retro-resistant armour worn by the Remote forty generations later, then it's hard to say whether it's a result of the tribes' visions of the future or just of the shape of the human psyche.

A particularly unusual ghost shirt was found among the bodies after the famous massacre at Wounded Knee. Made of rare white buckskin and decorated with a rendering of a human-shaped skulls bearing tusks, this shirt had twelve bullet holes, back and front, with powder bums but no traces of blood. Survivors of the massacre claim with certainty that this shirt belonged to Blackghost himself, who fled in shame at the failure of his magic. If Blackghost was indeed an agent of Faction Paradox then it's more likely they simply decided to cut their losses and pull him out of the warzone.

GRAGOV [*Lesser Species: Location (Earth, C15)*] Former village in Wallachia, Eastern Europe, located in the lower reaches of the Carpathian mountains not far from Poenari. The village had vanished by the mid-fifteenth century, possibly destroyed by Wallachia's unstable voivode-princes, but the site's now famous for the brief battle – or rather, rout – said to have taken place there shortly afterwards. The engagement is remembered as the first conflict between humanity and the factions involved in the War, and began when a military cohort led by the voivode Vlad III unexpectedly encountered a small fortress in the foothills, later described (in 1469) as 'the broken tooth of the mountains'.

Unquestionably, Vlad had stumbled upon the outpost which marked the edge of Mictlan. Though the local capital city of Tirgoviste had already become a "suburb" of the Celestis' realm, Gragov was effectively the Mictlan city wall, one of many outposts beyond which lay the meta-stronghold of the Celestis themselves. And after Tirgoviste, Vlad had already developed a grudge against the Celestis even though it's doubtful he had the slightest idea what they represented.

Within half an hour of the scouts' first sighting, Vlad's military forces had prepared themselves for the attack. Their leader, who'd been so atypically silent and focused throughout the march to Poenari, once again became a screaming, restless force of nature. In many ways he was his usual self, arranging the weapons and strategies of his retinue while threatening vicious executions for those who were marginally too slow, too messy or just too unlucky to meet with his approval. He's described as moving among his forces like some kind of predatory beast, not just the ruthless warrior-prince but a kind of living death on the battlefield. Even this may have been a deliberate slight against the Celestis, beings which he must have known *were* death, at least as much as any race could be.

The earliest sign that something was wrong came when the first wave of soldiers was within fifty metres of the fortress. As good orthodox Christians, the men had largely been raised to believe that the Islamic hordes (which they still believed they'd be fighting) wore 'the faces of animals', and they must have been expecting bitter battle; trickery; perhaps even eastern diabolism. They weren't expecting *flight*, however.

Though Vlad III himself only grew more excitable on seeing the 'winged devils' launch themselves from the fortress's rooftops, the ranks began to panic. None of them had any experience of aerial combat, naturally. Nor would they have known how to face warriors who seemed to have skins made of stone.

The gargoyles of the Celestis only took on that name after the incident at Gragov. This was their most medieval aspect. Surviving troops claimed there were 'six-hundred' of them, although all military accounts from this period were prone to exaggeration. Furthermore, as gargoyles are well-known for their ability to rip parts out of each others' hides in order to gain extra mass there must have been some confusion as to how many of these monsters might have been guarding the Mictlan outskirts. The sky was said to be black with their wings, but then, the sky was near-black already.

Though the ensuing battle was predictably one-sided, in a sense Vlad III deserves some credit. Not only was he the first human being to make true contact with one of the War Era parties (although humanity had encountered Pre-War entities like the Mal'akh at least three-thousand years earlier), he also became the first human being to actually launch an attack on a War stronghold… a similar folly to the attack on the Eleven-Day Empire staged by the "descendants" of his Order of the Dragon over three-hundred years later. If he'd known the full extent of the Celestis' power – if he'd known that the fortress was only the smallest outpost of Mictlan's noosphere, and that beyond it lay entire *worlds* full of enemies – then in all honesty he probably would have done exactly the same thing.

Gargoyles are brutal in their tactics, and this first encounter with humanity set the pattern for later engagements. The forward-riders were wrenched off their horses, the first infantrymen fell as great stone bulks dropped onto them from above, and the few wounds inflicted on the gargoyles only succeeded in removing a few basal components. Eventually some of the men, swinging their weapons in the near-darkness, were lucky enough to bring one of the creatures crashing to Earth with a large gaping lesion in one side. But it only returned, lop-sidedly and on one wing, to the fortress: the scouts who'd scurried from the carnage reported seeing it 'draw strength from the rock'. In less than a minute the army had been

scattered, the men divided into scared and helpless groups, and yet tellingly many of them fought on as best they could rather than beating a fast retreat. It wasn't so much that they feared Vlad more than the devils. It was just that they were so used to obeying their *voivode*, it never occurred to them to defy him even in the face of an impossible enemy.

With the frontlines decimated the men finally began to fall back, and as the gargoyles' sole purpose was to protect Mictlan's outposts they too started to turn away. Myth holds that despite their fatigue the survivors didn't stop moving until they reached Poenari, some of them refusing to remove their armour (still afraid of Vlad's discipline?) and dropping dead of exhaustion as they crossed the foothills. Only one of Vlad's personal bodyguard escaped, and he died mere days after his return to civilisation. The mystery, of course, is what happened to Vlad himself. History shows that the following day he finally arrived at his Poenari stronghold, and that as soon as he appeared he was ready to concern himself with the more mundane Turkish army advancing on the area from Tirgoviste.

Later Russian versions of the story claim that Vlad III was typically unafraid in the face of the "Ottoman" gargoyles, but Russia was always well-disposed towards him, and as the stories claim he stood at the very head of the attack (obviously untrue) this may be sheer fantasy. However, even the hostile German version of the tale refers to Vlad's bravery, or at least his obstinacy. Yet if he *had* refused to sound the retreat at Gragov, and according to folklore been seen to fall under the claws of the "devils in stone", then how had he survived?

Of course, the Celestis will take any opportunity to provide themselves with new servants and/or meme-donors. On first sight it seems impossible to believe that Vlad III could *possibly* agree to become anyone's servant, not even in the face of certain death. But evidence does exist to suggest a later connection between Vlad and Lord Halved Birth of the Celestis. And perhaps it wouldn't have been so hard for Vlad to justify a deal of some kind. After all, since childhood he'd considered it his place to be a conduit for the higher forces, chiefly as God's *hand of justice* in the Balkans. If at Gragov he began to understand that the Celestis weren't *literally* devils, then he might have been prepared to accept these Mephistophelean visitors as, well, almost equal in rank to himself.

***THE* GRAND FAMILIES [*Lesser Species: Group (Earth)*]** Study English history for any length of time, especially the period stretching from the early fourteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, and a roll call of prominent politicians, advisors, generals, admirals and other movers and shakers begins to look less like a random list and more like a family tree. Factor in one additional element and the "white noise" of interference from random powers vanishes, to be replaced by a web of events, persons and organisations all linked by one thing: membership of one of the five Grand Families.

They had their origins in the Crusades, being formed from the remnants of the military-religious order which first began the organised fight against the presence of the Mal'akh. Given the nature of the Families, many observers have long suspected the influence of the Great *Houses*, despite the fact that the Houses have always insisted they know nothing of the Mal'akh and have no official influence on Earth. It may be true, however, that the five most active Pre-War Houses all intervened in some way during the twelfth century, perhaps because the time-aware Mal'akh could prove a threat if left unchecked. In 1325 the Fraternal Society of St. George was founded in Hungary. It was followed five years later by the Order of the Band in Castille-Leon, and in 1348 the Society of St. George (A.K.A. the Order of the Garter) was founded, to say nothing of the fifteenth century's even more ominous Order of the Dragon. The exact connections between these groups can be cloudy, especially since most of the Families' more useful documents were destroyed in the Grindlay's Warehouse fire of 1861, but all of them seem to have had an influence on the quasi-mystical Star Chamber of Britain.

The families who comprised the initial founding of the Order of the Garter were to remain at the forefront of European politics for centuries, laying down the foundations for an association of scholars, politicians, occultists and other agents who would eventually permeate the higher strata of British society. Each of the five major lineages – the Cecils, the Greys, the Howards/Arundels, the Percys and the Stanleys – appears to have adopted the mantle of one of the five ruling Houses of the Homeworld[3], but as with any other comparison this could be simply the result of a certain resonance in history rather than evidence of direct influence.

GRANDFATHER PARADOX *(REPRESENTATIONS)* [*Faction Paradox: Culture*] In any world and time where Faction Paradox's presence is known, or even suggested, it's possible to purchase various items purporting to be representations of the Faction's Grandfather: blurry photographs, paintings, icons, statues and so on. They're usually sold by swindlers and counterfeiters who specialise in the lore of the Spiral Underworld, in the back rooms of magic shops or via ads in the more specialised specialist magazines. One advertisement offering to sell a photograph of the Grandfather appeared in *Fate* magazine for a full year between 2004 and 2005. The photograph itself proved to be just a remarkably mundane image of some kind of extra-dimensional monster, taken in Greenwich some years previously. It didn't even have a missing arm, which must surely be the Grandfather's main defining feature.

Other representations are seeded across the universe by various minor powers in efforts to discredit or annoy the Faction. Frequently these are just doctored pictures, paintings, or statues depicting the Grandfather as some unpopular public or political figure of the region, presumably in the hope that the association will hinder any Faction recruitment attempts in the area. One of the more memorable of these is a political cartoon in an underground paper from the Soviet Union, where Stalin is portrayed as a one-armed man devouring the histories of those he's purged. In a similar vein the forecourt of the Winter Palace in the Thirteen-Day Republic contained, among its more conventional statuary, a vacant plinth jokingly said to be the most accurate depiction of the Grandfather ever produced. The Russian inscription on the plinth read (and probably still reads): "I See No Grandfather."

But even in locales where the Faction is welcomed, the founder tends to be represented by absences. A statue of the Grandfather rests on top of the ersatz Nelson's Column in the Eleven-Day Empire, for example, although nobody has ever been able to make out the details from ground level (with the possible exception of Godfather Morlock). The truth is that very few members of the Faction make any claim of knowing what the Grandfather looks like, aside from the missing arm. Indeed the importance of the severed arm, as the one easily-imaginable focus of the Grandfather, is such that the Grandfather's arm itself has become an object of totemic

fascination. It was, after all, this absent organ which ultimately caused the downfall of Devonire, the Houses' great "reconciler".

***THE* GRANDFATHER'S ARM [*Faction Paradox: Legendary Relic*]** The mythos of Faction Paradox holds that the Faction was first envisaged, at least as a "political" movement, on the same day that the Grandfather of House Paradox escaped the confinement of the ruling Houses. The Grandfather's first act, according to this modern (barely two-hundred-year-old) tradition, was to sever one arm with an ordinary knife: an important symbolic gesture, as the arm would certainly have been marked with the Houses' criminal tattoo, a biodata tag which would have linked the Grandfather to the House authorities via his own past history.

It's unsurprising, then, that the arm itself should become such an object of fascination for groups outside the Faction. Devonire, "reconciler" under the early War Era Presidency, went so far as to conclude that to recover the arm would be to earn the respect of Faction Paradox and act as an overture to diplomatic negotiations. The belief may have been misguided, but there's a certain "give-and-take" reason to it, especially considering that Devonire was a former Academician for Game Logic.

It's easy to determine when Devonire developed the idea of recovering the Grandfather's arm. From that point on his journal, his public and his private conversations all tended to dwell on it. As he wrote to several other academicians: 'It is said that the Grandfather cut off the arm to remove the tattoo, before being erased from the causal nexus and leaving nothing behind. But we know that the Faction is already in possession of things which should not logically exist [probably a reference to the armour worn by the Faction's agents]. So it remains quite possible that the arm still exists, severed from the Grandfather before the moment of erasure.'

Devonire became obsessed with this new mission. Practically, the most he hoped for was an agreement that the Faction wouldn't overtly interfere in War affairs. Idealistically, though, he believed that if he could just get the Faction's representatives to the table then his skills as a negotiator would bring them back in to the fold and finally re-unite the Houses. He began the search in the prison enclave where the Grandfather had once been suspended, then expanded it to the surrounding areas of causality. His search continued in regions where the Faction's influence was particularly strong, such as Dronid and the sites of the Thousand-Year Battles,

presumably in the hope that the relic had (like so much else in the War Era) already been found once but then lost again.

Finally Devonire came into contact with an individual identifying herself as the Immaculata Formosii, whose origin is one of the more complicated and controversial stories of the War Era. Formosii claimed to be an agent of Faction Paradox (an unlikely claim but not an impossible one, as the Immaculati was notoriously restless during the early years of the War and changed sides at least twice). She claimed that possession of the arm was passed on from cell to cell so that all the Faction's adherents could be "touched" by the hand of the Grandfather, in addition to making the relic harder for any enemy powers to locate. Formosii told Devonire that she was thinking of leaving the Faction and that her cell was currently in possession of the arm. She offered to steal the relic for him, but refused to name a price, confident that the closer Devonire came to his goal the higher the price he'd be willing to pay.

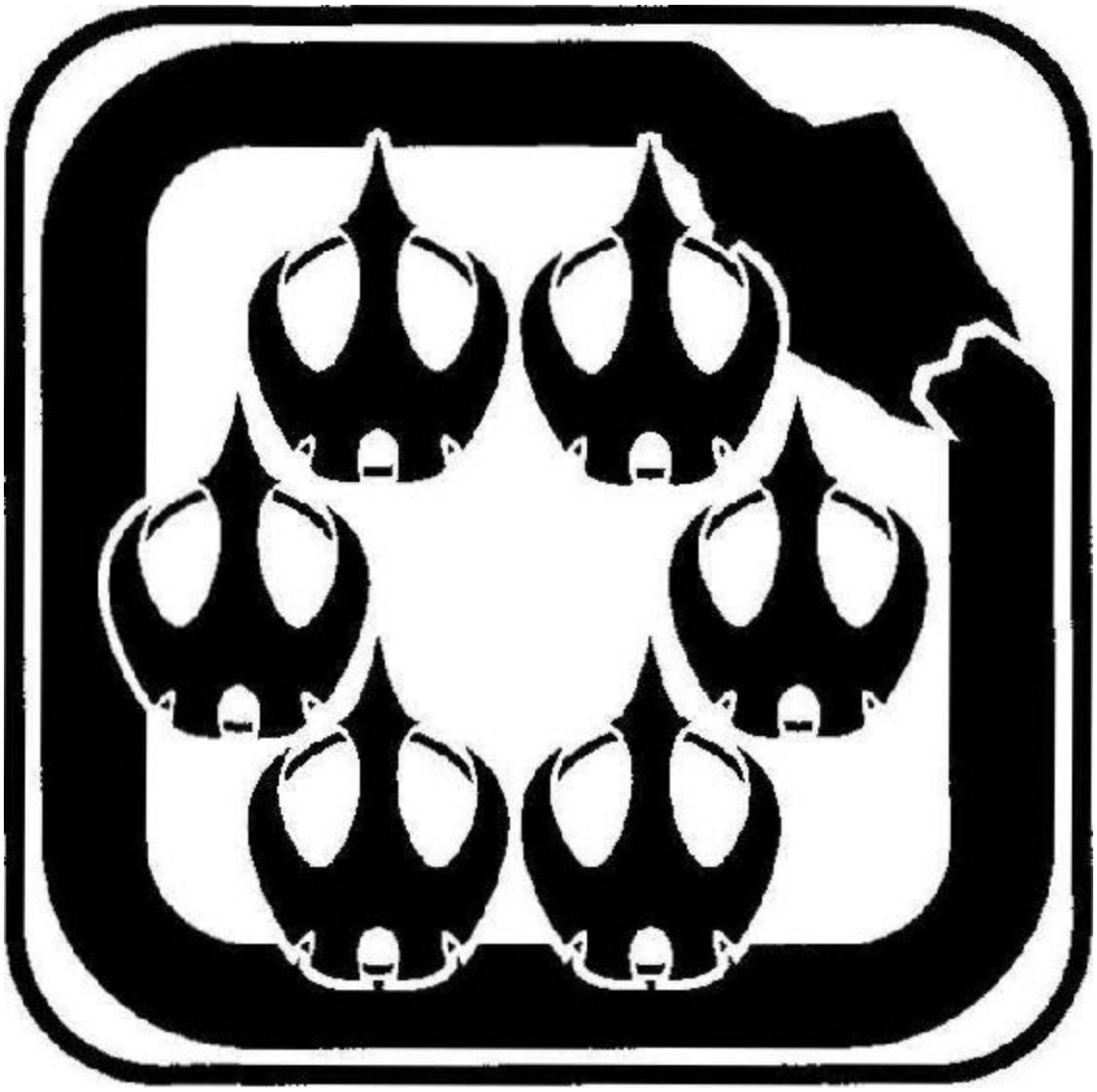
The totemic power of the arm is evident in the fact that even when he discovered it to be *in the Faction's possession*, Devonire still insisted on pursuing it. By this stage it must have been obvious that it had no value as a bargaining tool, yet for Devonire the quest had become an end in itself: apt, for the first of the Homeworld's great gamesmen. In fairness, the rendezvous between Devonire and Formosii on Kaiwar *did* result in Devonire gaining a (clearly paradoxical) relic which fitted the description of the Grandfather's arm. However, *that* arm isn't widely believed to have been of any importance at all, despite the part it played in triggering Devonire's nervous collapse.

The genuine article has never been uncovered, but more importantly there's no mention of it in any of the Faction's own lore. It can safely be concluded that Formosii's story to Devonire was entirely untrue. Perhaps the Grandfather took the *real* arm out of history along with everything else, as a kind of memento.

GRAVITY SPIDERS [*Great House Military: Technology*] A War Era weapon, apparently designed to capitalise on a weakness inherent in a number of enemy time-travel methods, gravity spiders are engineered matter-forms which can either function individually or lock together to form larger "warhead" structures. One of a *retro-preemptive* class of weapons, the spiders are projected back in time as far as energies allow, measure the average gravitational pull of the universe as they pass backwards through it, and then wait for changes to that gravity. These changes, caused by the intrusions of time-vessels into new areas of space-time, are sometimes referred to as time-thickening. In short, where new matter exists, new gravity attracts. Alerted to this extra gravity, the spiders gradually converge and will eventually arrive at the point from which the gravity originated: the enemy time-vessel's point of entry. On arrival two or move gravity spiders can lock together into a warhead, theoretically destroying whatever they find there.

While a reasonably devastating weapon in themselves, the spiders' real function is to provoke a specific response, and it was as a result of their existence that forces opposed to the Great Houses begin experiments into so-called zero time.

***THE* GREAT HOUSES [*Major Power*]** Most of those who've become aware of the War consider the Great Houses to be the most significant and influential species on the stage of the Spiral Politic, although this is questionable: the Houses are barely a "species" at all. "Species" suggests something genetic, something evolutionary, but even today it remains unclear whether evolution would even exist in its present form without the Houses at its root-point. More accurately, the Houses – the aristocratic, allegedly immortal bloodlines which have acted as anchors on the superstructure of history for either ten-million years (in their own time) or since time immemorial (in everyone else's) – are a meta-culture. They existed before any other surviving life, and therefore had, according to their own protocols, the divine right to adjust the structural history of the early universe. Their own ideas, their own needs and vested interests, primed the continuum long before any other witnesses (apart, perhaps, from the Yssgaroth) were in existence to argue the point.



[[▲THE GREAT HOUSES.]]

It's long been held that the Great Houses may well have been responsible for many of the physical laws of the universe as they're now known, but even that misses the point. The Houses *are* those physical laws. The laws are extensions of their own selves, of their identities and of their culture. In theory, the idea that anybody might be capable of going to *war* with these bloodlines is utterly ridiculous. In theory, it would be like going to war with gravity, or with a colour, or an element, or a geometric shape.

In practice, however, the last fifty years have shown that it's somehow possible.

Very little is known about the early development of the Houses, and there seems no point in speculating. The earliest record of the bloodlines relates to the period frequently called the anchoring of the thread. The lesser species often assume that this was simply the time when the Houses gained their current grasp of high-order technology, when they created the first timeships, sealed off their own Homeworld from the rest of the continuum and began chronoforming the history of the outside universe in order to insulate themselves. But in truth the anchoring was more than technological. Much as the Houses dislike the idea of the *biological*, there's a biological element to all their technology, and even their timeships aren't so much vessels as machines for re-writing their own biodata and re-processing their own futures. At the time of the anchoring the Houses themselves became something "other", something too fundamental to exist merely within the confines of the newly-created Spiral Politic. Arguably it was at this point that they ceased to be a species, in the accepted sense of the word.

Obviously this has led to constant descriptions of the Great Houses as "gods", but it's a description which nobody who's ever met a child of the Houses would ever use. The word "God" suggests something primal, something potent and ambitious, whereas the sterile, physically shrivelled nature of the Houses' elder members hardly fits the bill. Some cultures think of the Houses' agents as *bodiless*, and of the bloodlines as being inscrutable incorporeal forces existing outside of the physical universe: and although it's certainly the way the Houses *like* to be seen, it's not literally true. It's even been suggested that the reason the Houses haven't traditionally shown themselves in the outside universe is out of fear, which might seem odd for such an ostensibly all-powerful society, but perhaps it's their aversion to their own flesh which bothers them the most.

Above all, the most important thing to note about the Great Houses is their *sterility*. The Houses abandoned biological reproduction at the time of the anchoring – not necessarily by design – and since then each of the bloodlines has maintained its own reproductive machinery, in which the base matter and biodata are woven together (the breeding-engines are *slightly* prescient, though not enough to weave the newborn's entire life-story into his body). The same kind of technology has also taken steps to

remove death from the equation, these endless, unseen arbiters of history having the power to maintain their bodies indefinitely, at least in theory.

Deprived of organic evolution, deprived of the spur of mortality, for the last ten million years of their existence the Houses have been locked in a form of cultural stasis. They see themselves as monumental, as the severe, stone-faced guardians on the walls of eternity. They have no interest in progress: they consider it beneath them. They have no interest in high culture: they consider it incomprehensible. Their own biological heritage obviously bothers them… yet at the same time they lack the will to re-shape (or even leave behind) their bodies, unless the War should demand it. The status quo is coded into every cell of their flesh and blood, so it's no shock to learn that their own past interests them as little as their own evolution.

But perhaps this is an overly critical and one-sided view. The Houses may be culturally sterile, but they're in no way callous, although it's true that their more "humanitarian" interventions in the outside universe have been a matter of procedure rather than compassion. Their place is to defend the framework of history, often interfering in the affairs of lesser time-active species in order to prevent damage to causality, even if it's believed by many that this is a form of secondhand self-defence: history itself is an extension of the Great Houses, their legacy in the outside universe, and they're sworn to defend it as if it were a part of their own flesh.

[[▲ GREAT HOUSE member Academician Devonire, shortly before his incarceration.]]

A full summary of the Great Houses' activities over the aeons would be unimaginably long and mostly tedious, but the most significant details are those which affect other worlds. The Yssgaroth campaigns, the primal, prehistoric battles which left the universe scarred forever; the Imperator Presidency, the point at which the status quo began to crumble, and the only Pre-War chapter in the Houses' history when the leadership of the Homeworld decided to take a *military* interest in the rest of the Spiral Politic; the rise of the errant House Paradox (later Faction Paradox); and of course, the War itself, a cataclysm which has already seen much of House society overturned and a new, aggressive front emerge from the sterility of the Homeworld. The number of Houses producing offspring has increased drastically since the start of the War, as has the breeding-engines' rate of production, and that's not even including the Newblood lines which choose to ally themselves with the House Military rather than the more traditional ruling Houses.

Today life on the Homeworld remains as rigid and as formal as ever, but in light of the War the walls of time around it have become siege-walls, both a defence against the Houses' prime enemy and a prison for those few who might once have taken an interest in seeing the Spiral Politic for themselves. A thousand years ago the Houses were aloof and detached, yet now the Homeworld has begun to take a more proactive stance. Cultures have been destroyed in breach of all the accepted Protocols of Causality, societies have been infiltrated (even *steered*) by agents of the War King, and defences have been placed around the continuum to ensure that if the enemy should gain too much ground then entire structural sections of history could be removed by way of reprisal. Once upon a time, the Houses were – perhaps literally – the embodiments of neutrality.

This is no longer the case. If the Great Houses can indeed be considered the "gods" of the time-aware universe, then after fifty years of fighting it's become clear that this is nothing short of a new War in Heaven.

***THE* GREATER AUTROBULAN FRANCHISE [*Lesser Species*: *Location (World)*]** Site of the largest and most significant Beshielach colony, the Autrobulus hive is best-remembered for the unusual agreement – made despite the obvious protests of the Great Houses – between the hive and the *So, we're back to Autrobulus already, are we? Personally I thought we'd established, back when we were talking about the beshielach, that this really wasn't worth discussing. Now, if you recall I was trying to explain what happened between myself and the Celestis, and even if it's not any more useful to you it might at least be more interesting.*

Let me tell you a little something about the Celestis: they're scum. Unpleasant, arrogant, self-obsessed scum, and among their servants there used to be a rumour that they were so appalling the universe itself refused to have anything to do with them. The Spiral Politic vomited them – and their little enclave, Mictlan – out of its body. Of course, the Celestis knew that as conceptual presences they couldn't exist without people thinking about them, which is why they started collecting servants in the first place. Oh… hang on a moment. I'll be right back although the Autrobulan authorities quickly saw the merits of such an arrangement, and began training portions of their population to be caretakers for the larger Beshielach. Within a decade the first of the facilities was in operation, and the Autrobulan Ambassadorial Corps had been founded, even if the founding was at gunpoint.

The facilities, interestingly enough, were very easy to create. The Beshielach graciously allowed construction on their very surfaces, promising geologic stability. They made it clear, however, that they'd tolerate no abuse from the mites they were hosting. Should the hominid-sized residents damage the Beshielach in any way, they'd be opening themselves up for retaliation by their very homes. But the Beshielach weren't capricious: it was some considerable time before any Beshielach made good on the earlier threat, and if so, the Beshielach in question was exonerated under *Sorry about that. One of the kids was acting up again. Anyway, where was I?*

That's right, the Celestis started collecting servants. Not because the Celestis actually had tasks that they didn't want to do themselves, but because they

needed someone to pay attention to them. You know, I'm a special case so l have no way of knowing for certain, but I'm not sure the servants were even really there. In Mictlan everything's conceptual, no exceptions. So if you're an idea, and you need somebody to think about you if you want to survive, being thought about by another idea seems as if it wouldn't do much good. It'd be a Red Queen's Race, at best. No, I think having the servants in Mictlan was just incidental: I think what kept the Celestis going was the thoughts of the servants before they become servants. Mictlan needed fuel, basically.

Sometimes I wonder if the only reason Mictlan was such a depressing place was because the servants expected it to be. After all, the ideal way for the Celestis to get people to really ponder them was to tell them they'd just sealed their fate with respect to the afterlife. Which, in most theologies, is the equivalent to selling your soul to the Ur-devil. So the prospective servants were all expecting hell, and as a result Mictlan was hell. Although admittedly they must have been hoping for hell with a "sufficiently advanced technology" bent rather than the "supernatural forces" approach they ended up with. But that's the Lords Celestial for you.

Lords Celestial. Yes. That's where the story's going, don't you think?

***THE* GREGORIAN COMPACT [*Faction Paradox: Treaty (Pre-War Era/Earth, C18)*]** The contract arranged between House Paradox and the court of King George II of England, by which the House agreed to "purchase" eleven days out of the British calendar, the 3rd to the 13th of September, 1752: the days which were used to found the Eleven-Day Empire. The delegation to the British court was led by one of the Godfathers of House Paradox, and this much is known for certain, as it's recorded in English secret service records of the period (the "Service" in this era was almost as ritualised as House Paradox itself, largely influenced by the semi-occult Star Chamber, and would have kept a close eye on anything remotely arcane which might affect the monarchy). It's doubtful that anybody at court understood what House Paradox actually *represented*, but as the mid-eighteenth century was a period of great exploration into the Pacific and the Australian it's likely that the Grandfather's representative was treated no differently to any other exotic foreign envoy. A reception was held at Portsmouth, where the Godfather first arrived in the world, and a second was held in front of the King himself at St. James's Palace in London – much to the Star Chamber's alarm – before the contract was eventually signed in the parish of St. Giles-in-the-Field.

Faction lore holds that the Grandfather had four lieutenants, four Godfathers, in the early days of House Paradox. None of them are properly described, although the Service account details an 'amusement' performed by the visiting Godfather at the King's reception. The Godfather comes across as a traveller and diplomat from the lands of the east, a description which may have been influenced by the 'oriental dance' he performed. Or at least, his *shadow* performed the dance, the Godfather himself only making a series of elaborate gestures in order to steer its movements. The account mentions that the shadow had 'four arms in all… each with a different weapon in its grip', obviously a surprisingly adept use of the *sombras que corta*.

Although a bargain was clearly struck between the royal court and House Paradox, sadly the Service records don't outline what the House might have agreed to grant the King. As Britain was engaged in seemingly endless hostilities with France and already on the verge of an industrial revolution,

it may have been a gift of technology, or simply a quantity of gold (easily synthesised on the Homeworld) to help pay for the forthcoming war effort. The Godfather is known to have discussed the possibility of war with the King himself, perhaps feeling that their two cultures had a great deal in common. The upshot of the deal, however, was that the British were given sufficient ritual methods to *remove* the lost eleven days when the calendar changed from the Julian to the Gregorian version in September. The eleven days were then taken away by House Paradox, and used to build the foundations of the Eleven-Day Empire, the first alter-time environment to be set apart from the history dictated by the Great Houses.

The Gregorian Compact was a cornerstone in War Era politics, the first "official" pact between House (later Faction) Paradox and humanity. It's significant that the mid-eighteenth century should have been the first true point of contact, partly because this was the era in which Earth first showed signs of becoming time-aware (in other words, when it first took on an importance to the Spiral Politic) but mostly because it was the "golden age" of the Caribbean voodoo-cults… cults whose techniques bear a remarkable similarity to the rituals of Faction Paradox. It's doubtful that there was any real connection between the two, but it may well have attracted the Grandfather's attention.

GRINDLAY'S WAREHOUSE [*Lesser Species: Location (Earth, C19)*]
Storage facility used by the nineteenth century Star Chamber for the archiving of some of the more sensitive artefacts and documents belonging to the organisation and its members. It was burned to the ground in the spring of 1861, taking with it most of the Chamber's inventory, as well as a massive collection of Oriental manuscripts, books and journals collected by and written by Sir Richard Francis Burton: these being possibly the greatest loss, as Burton's Indian and Arabic journals included most of his notes on the practice of the physiological manipulation of time, the use of erotic techniques in summoning rituals and the anatomy of the more exotic grotesques encountered during his expeditions. Although no perpetrator was ever discovered, the prime suspects are the Mal'akh, who had the most to gain from the destruction of the facility. It's feasible that their target was actually the *Liber Sanguisugarum*, but the book was at the time in safe keeping at the Ashmolean Library.

GROTESQUES [*Lesser Species: Participants (Earth, Mal'akh)*] Name given to the Mal'akh who, having stopped feeding upon the blood of humans, have turned upon themselves instead. Without the ingestion of a suitable, untainted biomass the memetic field of the Mal'akh – already strained by their link to two separate universes – is stretched to breaking point. The result is that the individual's form is distorted into unpredictable shapes, but tending towards the animalistic, as the mind tends to degenerate along with the body. The hideous shapes assumed by these unfortunates are possibly responsible for many of the "demonic" images of Middle Eastern legend, a theory supported by Richard Francis Burton's surviving account of his expedition to the Mountains of the Moon, where his journal speaks of his companion's delirious ravings of encounters with winged, lion-headed demons. (The phrase "lion-headed" may be used here in its Biblical sense, meaning "monstrous" or "bestial" rather than actually lion-like.)

This was the same expedition which discovered the remains of the High Place, the first settlement of Mal'akh on Earth. Considering their long isolation from the world, it appears the inhabitants of the city found in this region had long ago taken to feeding on each other, or on lesser creatures, producing a small civilisation of monstrosities. The term "grotesques" was coined by Burton, in his entry on the subject in the *Liber Sanguisugarum*. The more civilised Mal'akh often keep grotesques as pets, and it's not unknown for a Mal'akh to force the change upon an enemy, if a rival should fall into its hands.

The creature summoned in Karachi in 1845 has been described as bearing certain bestial characteristics suggestive of a grotesque: then again, this may just have been exaggeration on the part of the witnesses. [For picture, see under Napoleonic Era.]

***HOUSE* HALFLING [*Lesser Species: Group (City of the Saved)*]** The one blot upon the utopian aspirations of the City of the Saved has been its treatment of its partially-human members: not the prehuman and posthuman species, who are treated as full citizens, but the individuals of mixed human and non-human genetic background. This does, of course, include posthuman/House crossbreeds such as the regen-inf troopers, who tend to end up ghettoised in rundown and politically unrepresented Districts of the City, but it also includes individuals who result from artificially-fertile unions between human and non-human partners as well as their descendants (although it's been necessary to formulate a legal definition whereby an individual who has less than one-eighth non-human blood is considered to be fully human).

Perhaps because the existence of the City itself is such a jingoistic exercise, pro-human feeling runs high. For most citizens this results in a warm glow of acceptance and community spirit, but given the stringent definitions applied by the City (non-human adopted or naturalised into human cultures, for instance, have never been among the resurrected… nor have culturally-human artificial intelligences) there's a feeling that the partly-human are in some sense 'lucky to have got in'. They're not entitled to vote, except in the most decadently democratic Districts, and they're forbidden from serving in the Chamber of Residents or as City Councillors. In a City where even australopithecines are considered valuable members of the community, the partially-human are the only real underclass.

House Halfling was founded to amend this state of affairs. As the nomenclature would suggest the House's founder, "Grandfather Halfling", is of mixed human and Great House parentage (one of only a handful of such progeny in the known history of the universe, at least as far as can be discovered). Membership of the House is open to all the inhabitants of the City, regardless of their origins: indeed it counts among its number many socially-responsible full humans, one of whom, Amanda Legend Lefcourt, represents its views in the Chamber of Residents. Grandfather Halfling himself is a reclusive figure – it's been suggested that he spends much of his time outside the City – and Lefcourt forms its effective front towards the City as a whole. Nevertheless it's clear that The House has benefited vastly from the Grandfather's patrician leadership, achieving more political

respect within the City than entirely human powerblocs like the Ghetto of the Damned or the Piltdown Mob.

House Halfling's avowed goal is nothing less than the recognition of full rights for the part-human minorities, and towards this end its members campaign non-violently. One early success was in the House's repeated picketing of the City Olympiads, which resulted in the ban on part-human competitors (justified with spurious talk of 'differing abilities') being lifted in City year AF 84. It's the House's covert agenda which has become the subject of speculation, as much within the City as elsewhere: some citizens suggest that the House is working towards a final blending of the universe's peoples into one super-individual, while others – more hysterically – fear that the House wants to throw the City's gates open to resurrectees of all species, resulting in overcrowding, chaos and civil breakdown. Grandfather Halfling is on record as stating that the City represents 'at best a partial Omega Point for the universe, a poor and paltry thing compared with what we might one day help it become'. Many citizens have found this kind of pronouncement unreassuring.

***LORD* HALVED BIRTH [*Celestis: Participant (Present)*]** The first encounter between the Celestis and humanity occurred at Gragov in the later fifteenth century, a one-sided battle which saw the local *voivode*-prince Vlad III miraculously escape certain death at the hands of the Celestis's constructs. Vlad's reputation came from his ruthless application of Christian morality, not from his prowess in battle, so it's unthinkable that he might have been able to kill even one of the enemy creations in hand-to-hand combat. This has led to much speculation about the means of his survival, and the Celestis Lord Halved Birth has frequently been implicated.

German stories of the period refer to Vlad III as a "betrayer", as a leader who turned his back on his own kind and his own faith, and as a result many historians have interpreted the story of the encounter at Gragov as a mere metaphor. Later on in his life Vlad III did turn away from orthodox Christianity, becoming a Catholic for purely political reasons, yet this interpretation of the Gragov story doesn't really make sense. In the story the 'winged devils' of the Celestis are – mistakenly – portrayed as fiends summoned by the Islamic Turks: they might have symbolised the Ottoman empire, but they certainly don't seem to represent Catholicism (and of course, conventional historians refuse to take the story *literally*). So if Vlad "sold out", then is it possible he entered into a bargain with the Celestis themselves?

There's one crucial piece of evidence to suggest that he did: the fact that he survived for around five-hundred years afterwards.

The apparent inability of Vlad III to die has led to a great deal of speculation, and a great deal of inaccuracy. It's commonly been claimed that Vlad had some kind of link to the parasitic Mal'akh, an understandable mistake in context. Though it's not known whether Vlad ever encountered the Mal'akh face-to-face, there were certainly Mal'akh elements active in Constantinople during his fight against the Turks. And as he was often said to have dipped his bread in the blood of his victims, the stories were bound to take on a certain significance after the prince's supposed death and his escape towards the west. But Vlad never showed any signs of Mul'akh corruption, never consuming human flesh or

drinking blood in the quantities necessary for even the most hybridised of the Mal'akh line, and he opposed the 'bane of the east' for as long as he remained visible in the world.

An engraving exists, and is still on public display at Debrecen, of Vlad III within the walls of his mountain-fortress at Poenari. It shows him in some form of shrine, presumably located in the most private of his private quarters, and its symbology has convinced most historians that it was drawn for purely propagandist reasons. Vlad's chamber is depicted as being strewn with candles, suggestive of Catholicism but also indicating something almost satanic, in the nature of a black mass. The severed heads of his enemies sit on pikes around the edges of the room, a fantasy on the engraver's part as Vlad wasn't known to keep bodies, or the parts thereof, in his home. But the centrepiece of the illustration is an inhuman, bestial figure clearly intended to represent the Devil. The creature stands in the centre of the chamber, dressed in a Cardinal's robes – again, Catholic overtones – with huge, curved horns set against either side of its head. The face is leering and monstrous, a ridiculously long tongue emerging from its goat-like mouth. Vlad is kneeling before this abomination, with his sword before him, turned upwards to the ceiling. If it's an act of supplication then it's a strange one: perhaps the upturned sword-hilt is intended to represent an inverted crucifix, suggesting Vlad's betrayal of his orthodox Christian Order.

There are several similar engravings of Vlad III, most of them produced by the German race he so thoroughly persecuted, but this one makes the closest link between Vlad and the "Devil" suggested by his family name[4]. From a War perspective, however, it's interesting to note that tradition claims the engraving depicts a scene from the siege of Vlad's castle shortly after the disaster at Gragov, when his own brother led an army of Turks to capture the stronghold. The castle would have been virtually surrounded by this time, so it's not surprising that many versions of the legend claim Vlad called on supernatural forces (or at the very least, on gypsies) to make his escape across the nearby mountains.

When the Celestis broker deals to leave their Mark of Indenture on a new servant or assassin, they often do so by extending the life of a subject in an otherwise certain-death situation. And it's worth mentioning this in the

context of the siege of Poenari, simply because of the great similarities between the devil in the Debrecen engraving and the favoured Mephistophelean form of Lord Halved Birth. Furthermore, Investigator Thirty-One – one of the Celestis's army of Investigator-assassins – was known to have close links to Halved Birth during the early War Era, and it's commonly thought that Thirty-One had some connection to Prince Vlad… even, rumour has it, being Vlad's executioner nearly five centuries later

HAUSERKINDER [Faction Paradox: Legendary Participants]

'Where have these children come from?'
- Traditional.

Any time-active war is, by definition, partly fought in unrealised timelines as the combatants attempt to re-engineer local history to suit themselves. Alternative histories are actualised, razed and reiterated, and the plotting of temporal disruption is as much a map of the shifting battle-lines as it is an exercise in higher-dimensional mathematics. What survives of the scoured realities – through paradox, "oxbow" timelines or simple bureaucratic failure – is washed up on the shore of stable history and becomes folklore. The primary combatants of the War are content to ignore their own fallout, until it generates something spectacular and, above all, practical.

For Faction Paradox, nothing paradoxical is impractical.

Tales of the Hauserkinder can be found on most worlds where oral cultures have evolved, and the stories are remarkably consistent. A child spontaneously appears in the community. The community is typically enclosed, rural and self-contained. The child is typically an infant, or, failing that, approaching puberty. These shouldn't be seen as mere narrative conveniences but as being shaped by the nature of the community: a Hauserkinder child born into a city is just another homeless stranger and statistic. It's assumed that the societies which generated the folklore had their own methods for dealing with adult outsiders.

It's true that there's a lack of biological diversity among the Hauserkinder, even when reading between the lines of the folk-stories or compensating for generations of oral tradition. It's possible that collapsing timelines were localised, and expelled Hauserkinder within a spectrum of expected bio-normalcy. Hence there are few stories of homunculus children born into human cots. Another possibility is that the more exotic Hauserkinder were mistaken for animals, monsters or even gods. A third suggestion, in an account probably originating in the macabre lore of the Faction itself, describes new arrivals literally exploding on their arrival in unsuitable environments: their lungs crushed by the density of the poisonous air. The

average Father or Mother may have seen this as an opportunity to add something new and exciting to their wardrobe.

(It must be remembered that these accounts are based on oral tradition and are likely to have been subsumed by traditional oral narrative strategies. There are no stories of Hauserkinder babies being strangled or stabbed in their cots, but this shouldn't be surprising. That sort of story has never been very popular.)

Occasional Hauserkinder were treated as gods or prophets, though this doesn't reclude the possibility that they were also exploited, abused and sexually molested, all common experiences. One distinct variant on this theme is that of the *Cargo Prophetess*. The child, invariably female, incites the community – usually poor or oppressed – to reject materialism. On her command, her followers indulge in a frenzied *potlatch* or ritual destruction of property. This, the child promises, will prove to the gods that they are the chosen people: they will be rewarded with liberation and admission to paradise. Such stories usually end with the prophetess dying at the hands of a hungry mob, or vanishing before her victims work out who's to blame for all the mess.

Fully-documented stories of the Hauserkinder are hard to come by. It's believed that Freud gathered extensive Hauserkinder material, but subsequently destroyed all his notes on the subject (something he did quite often, in order to preserve the anonymity of his often-wealthy clients). Probably the most telling and in-depth tale of the Hauserkinder was "Justine's Story", included in an annexe of Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, complete with its overtones of off-world interference. Possibly this account provides the best clues as to why Faction Paradox should take such an interest in Hauserkinder lore.

Though he lent his name to the phenomenon, the enigmatic Kaspar Hauser was neither the product of a collapsed timeline nor of the slightest interest to Faction Paradox. In truth he was one of the Jungle Children engineered by House Arpexia, and a subtly different kind of animal.

***THE* HEAD OF THE PRESIDENCY [*Great Houses: Culture (Pre-War Era)*]** Although the phrase "the head of the Presidency" was used in the Pre-War Era to describe the effective leader of the Great Houses – the core of Homeworld politics, around whom the academicians and agents which made up the Presidency revolved – these days the phrase has somewhat unpleasant connotations, and has done ever since the Houses received the first message from the enemy, when the severed head of the Homeworld's then-leader unexpectedly materialised in the Hall of Addresses before a horrified assembly of the ruling Houses… a shot across the bows which made it clear that the War was not only possible but probably inevitable.

Forensic examination of the former head's head revealed some interesting information, however. It's tempting to refer to it as "shocking," but truth be told, by this point the Great Houses had already exceeded their capacity for shock.

House scientists discovered a .02% concentration of anti-piryons, suggesting that their leader had, as announced in the Faraway Declaration, journeyed back to the dawn of creation: a mere 3,500 years after the Big Bang, to be exact. (Piryons are subatomic particles which occur only at the very end of the universe. Anti-piryons, by contrast, are present only at the universe's birth.) However, this also seemed to indicate that he hadn't travelled through time at *all* after his arrival in the past, as both piryons and anti-piryons are "wiped" from matter by the conventional processes of time-travel Moreover, 1% concentration of piryons was discovered, indicating that the head had been within five years of the Big Crunch at the end of history. Time of death was established at one-hundred years before the head's arrival in the Hall.

In brief, the head of the Presidency had travelled back to the dawn of time and somehow been kept alive for practically the entire lifespan of the universe, before being allowed to die and then transported back to the Homeworld. The academician in charge of the examination called it 'an affront to every scientific datum in our repertoire', and refused to comment on the suggestion that the victim had been decapitated at the dawn of time and that the head alone had been kept alive to witness the whole run of creation. There were undoubtedly traces of some form of chemical

treatment, the substance visibly clinging to the former leader's large black moustache. Some pointed out that the head surely must have travelled in time in order to reach its final destination (even if it *did* still have piryon and anti-piryon traces in it), but this observation only underlined the utterly ludicrous capabilities of the enemy.

HEM *(HIGHEST ENTROPY MATTER)* [*House Military: Technology*] A term used to describe a form of destructive "anti-energy," employed by the nechronomancers of the more scientifically-minded military Houses. Technically speaking a contained volume of space, with its deep-foam structure artificially smoothed, dropping (or more correctly *draping*) veils of HEM around a target greatly inhibits energy transfer since large amounts of energy are required to create normal particle-anti-particle interactions before gross atomic or chemical action can occur: in other words, in the presence of HEM just about *any* action, or indeed the survival of most forms of life, becomes impossible. Pseudo-temperatures in the apparent range of minus three hundred Kelvin have been reported where HEM has been deployed.

HEM clusters left over from the early War Era will occasionally sweep across habitations, bringing with them tales of uncanny cold, fires which burn with no warmth, and ice forming in midsummer. These days, the "lost" planet of Ordifica lies beneath multiple layers of HEM.

HET LINC [*Lesser Species: Participant (City of the Saved)*] Inhabitant of the City of the Saved, and former City Ambassador to the Homeworld of the Great Houses. In life (334,961,115,132 – 334,961,147,104 AD) Het Linc was a noted philosopher, artisan, athlete, critic, navigator, biochemist, sculptor, legislator, chef, encyclopaedist, poet, soldier, antiquarian, counsellor, architect, musician, steersman, mystic, bookbinder, apothecary, curator, negotiator, footman, prophet, actor, farmer, detective, necromancer, chiropodist, smuggler, theologian, prostitute, translator, shepherd, mechanic, god-king, tailor, cinematographer and midwife of one of the Spiral Politic's last-known posthuman cultures: and as such was considered able to relate to the members of the Great Houses on something approaching their own terms.

In fact Het's tenure as Ambassador, AF 223 – 250 according to City dating, was outstanding in a number of surprising ways. The members of certain Houses found his extreme polymathy threatening, particularly in view of the fact that Het had already lived longer in his original lifetime than virtually any inhabitant of the Homeworld then alive. Their attention was drawn not only to the City itself (probably setting in train the course of events which led to Lady Mantissa's attack in AF 262), but also to Het's original culture, for whose eventual demise agents of House Mirraflex are now known to have been responsible. Het's great personal charisma, however, meant that many members of the Houses who actually met him were vividly impressed, and representations were made – and firmly rejected by the City Council – for an alliance between the City and certain of the Great Houses. Some even suggested that the City itself might be granted honorary House status, an idea which the leading Houses treated with predictable contempt.

Under Het Linc's influence, several younger and more impressionable members of the Houses actually offered to defect to the City. Embarrassment was caused when Het accepted their change of allegiance: the defections were not ratified by the City Council, whose policy has never been to grant citizen status to non-humans. Rejected angrily by the Homeworld, the would-be-defectors had to flee, declaring themselves the Citizens-in-Exile. They have since vanished without trace, some theories suggesting that they went on to become the City's Secret Architects. Het

Linc was recalled to the City itself, and following requests and veiled threats from certain Houses was not replaced as Ambassador to the Homeworld. He has since pursued a successful career as a jeweller, although he was quoted in a recent interview as ‘feeling it may be time for a change’.

HISTORY [*Terminology*] In a War where all the major powers are time-active, it's vital to understand the difference between "history" and "time". History has (or is) a structure, but has no tangible existence: it's a method of *perceiving* time, of recording it, remembering it and attempting to predict it. When groups like Faction Paradox talk about 'changing history', or the Great Houses talk about 'defending history', they're talking about a process that's as much psychological as material.

The ruling Houses have, since their founding, held that one of their duties is to protect history. But if history is really just a form of understanding, then the Houses are by definition only defending a version of history. The question automatically becomes 'whose?', and the answer is quite obviously 'their own'.

It's long been established that although the universe pre-dates the Houses by several billion years, they were arguably the first to imprint their will on existence, and many of the "natural" laws of creation – the all-pervading Protocols of the Great Houses – were laid down at the start of the bloodlines' ten-million-year reign during the anchoring of the thread. In effect the Houses *built* history, engineering it as a complex memetic structure running through the entire length of observed time (though certain parts of the far future seem to be beyond their reach, oddly).

The Homeworld itself was set apart from this structure, at least until the Imperator Presidency. The deeper Protocols aren't merely rules, but an infrastructure set into the universe itself which supports the histories of every other sentient species… with certain key exceptions. The attempts of groups like Faction Paradox to change history have been regarded as deliberate statements of rebellion, but more importantly they're a way of rebuilding that infrastructure.

The view taken by some posthuman sects is that the children of the Great Houses ceased to be true living things as soon as they gave up the natural reproductive cycle and linked their bodies to the continuum itself. At this point, says the posthuman theory, the Great Houses became *part* of time rather than actual biological entities. This is backed up by the Houses' ethical Protocols: whereas most species consider the preservation of life to be the greatest moral imperative, the Houses consider the preservation of

history to be a far bigger issue, almost as if they acknowledge that they're made out of pure history themselves. And if history is the stuff of which they're made, then the constant skirmishes between Faction Paradox and the other Houses are basically racial struggles. Many of the Houses wish to commit genocide against the impure "flesh" of the Faction, while the Faction constantly strives to introduce its own ethnic traits (mutant history, rather than mutant DNA) to the Houses' gene-pool.

It should be mentioned that history is not the only way to perceive time. Non-linear cultures have entirely different ways of explaining their pasts and futures, but as yet no nonlinear culture has managed to develop time-travel. The Great Houses' Protocols seem specifically designed to make sure their society moves forward through time in a straight line, albeit within a kind of time set apart from the rest of the Spiral Politic. Humanity seemed poised to become a non-linear time-active culture in the mid-twenty-first century, but ultimately the species declined and therefore failed to escape from history. It could be argued, of course, that the decline was organised by outside forces specifically to stop this happening.

HOLLOW SPECTACULARS [*Remote: Culture/Technology (Earth, C20-21)*] At any point in time someone will be denouncing a popular masterpiece as gibberish, particularly if that masterpiece happens to be a work of cinema. They may of course be right: commercial success isn't quality and in some cases the Emperor may have no clothes. But in some cases they may simply not have seen the same film which most people found so affecting. Diverted by Faction Hollywood's motivational analysts into a personalised alter-time state, they may have experienced a *hollow spectacular*, a re-edited, re-cast, re-scored and technically downgraded version of the genuine article, while all those around them drank in the qualities of the real film.

Naturally, the most common uses of this technique are to surgically re-direct criticism and to deflate the success of films which might threaten those studios and power-brokers who have, historically, been the Faction's most important clients. Attempts have been made to reverse-apply the technology and create the illusion of a film being better than it is, but after comparing the relative costs and per capita results Faction Hollywood has concluded that this is more easily accomplished by saturation advertising and intensive product placement, even though some of its older core members consider this a "selling out" of the cabal's protocols.

Michael Brookhaven's final folly/achievement as a producer was the elevation of the hollow spectacular to an art form in itself. Following the 1996 discovery of the GCI processor at UPN, Brookhaven's intention was to engineer a movie which only existed as a hollow spectacular, a production which would not only be perceived by each viewer in a unique way but make an entirely different impression on history depending on the nature of its audience. The film, properly entitled *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom*, might have been considered an artistic triumph if it hadn't been the project which ultimately led to the Hollywood Bowl shooting and the ultimate decline of Faction Hollywood.

Key to the film's structure was the fact that the story seemed to operate on at least six different levels, making a simple summary of the plot virtually impossible. Audiences were uncertain as to which of the six central characters [see box] was actually the *focus* of the story, from the girl-

woman Kodomo Kami (who sees the coming War of Gods as a mere curiosity, a child-like spectacle of inhuman enemies and exaggerated battles) to the villainous Lady Wakai (for whom the events onscreen are just part of a plot which spans entire centuries): At heart the film is an adventure story, theoretically set during the era of the Japanese Shogunate but heavily relying on symbolic mysticism and, as ever in a Brookhaven production, largely ignoring genuine Samurai history and custom. The plot *seems* to hinge on the Baron Amatsumara, a warrior-necromancer whose power to read the ashes of the dead is unnerving to peasants and fellow Samurai alike, who's nonetheless called upon to protect the small, peaceful village of Chikyu from a horde of "witches" gathering in the surrounding forests. The term "witches" is used loosely, as the creatures seen massing in their hundreds certainly aren't human, and draw on the traditional vampire mythos of Hollywood as well as the more "oriental evil" of the Order of the White Peacock.

Surprisingly the film ends in a victory for the Lady Wakai, or at least this is *one* interpretation. Various characters get what they deserve, while others simply get what they want. The village is saved from the witch-horde, and the warrior-mistress Awaremi survives to watch over it. The Shogun-King responsible for hiring the Mujun clan passes away at his Court, perhaps as a result of poison (the script is ambiguous). The Ghost Kingdom which Baron Amatsumara calls his home falls to Lady Wakai's goblin-horde – though in fact during the final, climactic battle it's the sorceress herself who literally *consumes* the Kingdom – leaving behind only three survivors: Kami, the hapless retainer Kishijoten (set up as a possible sidekick for a sequel) and Baron Nichiyobi. Yet Amatsumara himself seems oddly unconcerned about his homeland's fall, even during his own death-scene. It's a conclusion that left many audiences puzzled, unsure whether to cheer the heroic victory at Chikyu or mourn for the terrible scope of history unfolding in the Shogunate.

Edited and released in Brookhaven's "absence", it's impossible to judge the critical or commercial success of *The Ghost Kingdom*. The backlash held that the film was confused; that much of the dialogue was incomprehensible; that it was too long (a problem not helped by the additional, self-generated scenes created by the GCI processor); even, in the wake of its more-than-healthy action figure range, that it was over-

commercialised. The more positive response held that it had a scope almost unknown in cinema; that its world-environment of a savage, mythic, millennia-spanning Japan was beyond anything previously attempted on film; that it was, in short, a work of *beauty*. But there's no way of telling which of these two camps was in the majority. It was in the nature of the film, the ultimate Brookhaven Spectacular, that its alter-time effects should remain with audiences even after they left the cinemas. Not only do the movie's critics – including some of its cast – insist that it was a monumental failure, they remain locked into a world where *nobody* liked it.

There are so many claims and counter-claims regarding its box office receipts that even making a study of its economic success is pointless. At the end of the day, the only element of certainty is that Brookhaven never returned from its filming.

Brookhaven's Ghost Kingdom: The Six Central Characters

Baron Amatsumara: Prominent-yet-questionable Samurai of the Mujun clan, called upon to act as protector of the village of Chikyu. Established as an anti-hero almost from the first scene, the villagers remain wary of both Amatsumara and the bloodline he represents, which is known to practice necromancy and said to trap the spirits of the dead inside masks of elephant-ivory. Though Amatsumara's sardonic wit and undeniable knowledge play a vital role in saving the village, with his shaved head and dark, satyric beard he's presented as a distinctly dangerous and unpredictable presence: there's a suggestion that despite his heroic role his real purpose is to preserve the traditions of his clan, and pass the spirits of the Mujun ancestors down to the next generation.

Awaremi: A female warrior-noble, in breach of all Japanese tradition, and Chikyu's one local defender. Initially Awaremi seems to want nothing more than to save the village she calls her home, and her sarcastic tongue is almost a match for Amatsumara's as they fight back-to-back against the witch-horde. It's later revealed that she herself is a (white) witch, the child of the most renowned and benevolent sorceress ever known in Shogunate society, although it's said that the elder witch was eventually slain at the hand of her own sister. Even if the defence of the village remains

Awaremi's chief concern, there are schemes within schemes and the sense of a definite need for revenge.

Lady Wakai: The story frequently moves away from the village to focus on events at the Court of the Shogun-King, where the old, blind and entirely mythical King Senso is being attended by various fawning lords of the *bushi*, all of whom hope to be well-regarded in his will. What none of them suspect is that one of the King's sons has been seduced by a lady of the court, Lady Wakai, in truth none other than Awaremi's murderous aunt. Later in the film it's revealed to the audience, though not to the characters, that Wakai is behind the attacks on Chikyu: in one sequence she appears before her horde dressed in a butterfly-robe of silk and with her face hidden by a white porcelain mask, becoming the symbolic mother of all monsters. Her eventual aim is not simply to feed on the lifeblood of the villagers but to seize the throne for herself and her offspring. It's a plan which may take generations to come to fruition.

Kodomo Kami: Seventeen years of age, yet depicted as a child awakening in a wider world, Kodomo Kami's family occupies a once-grand but now crumbling imperial homestead not far from the village. Awaremi immediately identifies the girl as possessing witch-blood much like that of her own family line, though the girl herself remains unaware of it despite an interest in necromancy which intrigues the Baron. This theme, of an adolescent "chosen one" with a blood-calling as a warrior or saviour-figure, is a mythic standard and was at the time *de rigeur* in any Hollywood fantasy. In what may be the most striking sequence of the film Amatsumara shows Kami the Ghost Kingdom, the vast, visionary realm of the ancestors which forms the traditional seat of power and place of worship for the Mujun Samurai. It's here that the Baron and the inner circle of the clan eventually pass on their birthright to the young Kami, a jet-black *katana* sword said to have belonged to the order's founder.

Baron Nichiyobi: Another warrior of the Mujun clan, representing the military aspect of the order as opposed to Amatsumara's more ritualistic approach. In the key turning-point of the story, the two Samurai discuss Kodomo Kami in a darkened and firelit forest clearing while they await the approaching army of demons. A bet is made, with Nichiyobi wagering a single gold coin that Amatsumara will never be able to exploit the girl's

talent for necromancy. The scene has a brooding and fatalistic quality, the suggestion being that the clan, like all the Samurai orders, is about to be overtaken by history. There's even a suggestion that Amatsumara himself may play a deliberate role in the clan's eventual downfall, perhaps a hint that he intends to use Kami as a mere conduit, a necromantic focus through which he plans to summon the ancestor-spirits and recapture the sorcerers' past glories.

Kishijoten: Wisecracking, unsophisticated peasant girl who, as a lower class member, is depicted as not having "the blood" to understand the society politics' ways. Kishijoten's role is mostly one of comic support, and the cinema-going audience generally found her annoyingly glib.

THE HOLLYWOOD BOWL SHOOTING [*Remote: Event (Earth, C20)*]

There is, in black magic, no bowl that will not at some time be filled with blood.'
– The Duc de Richleau.

Despite the frequent and orgiastic practices of Faction Hollywood, and despite the entertainment industry's traditions of symbolic "killing", "murder" and "dying a death", even at its most over-literal the studio clique headed by Michael Brookhaven (from 1977 – 1999) never indulged in anything approaching human sacrifice or more bloodthirsty than cosmetic/surgical mutilation, Everyone on the fringes of LA high culture has at some point speculated on the existence of a bona fide "snuff porn" film[5], but it seems likely that even the Emperor of Excesses would have found the *anxiety* of the idea far more appealing than the sordid act of genuinely *making* one. Yet ironically the demise of Brookhaven himself is represented by one of his own works, even if his ultimate fate was kept firmly off-screen.

Michael Brookhaven's final film project – and, arguably, the film which brought the golden age of Faction Hollywood to an end – was conceived as early as 1995, but although it took over three years of work the actual filming process was scheduled to take only a single day. By that stage the film had virtually been completed inside a recovered meme-mine GCI processor and only the presence of the actors was required, speaking the lines already laid down by the processor's memetic "script", almost as if the recitation was the trigger needed to bring the finished product into being. The intention was that the production should require no sets, no props, no costumes and no real camerawork: the complete world-environment of the film would be summoned to the staging area, briefly over-writing everything from the local architecture to the actors' biological makeup. The complete experience would be transferred directly onto celluloid via the same process Brookhaven had once used to trap the *loa* on film, but this time trapping an entire ghost *world*, although in truth Brookhaven probably found the actual transfer of the movie to film to be a minor detail.

The staging area he chose was the Hollywood Bowl. The choice was a reasonable one. Any ritual is best performed within an arena or on a public

stage, simply because of the symbolic potential provided by an open, acoustically-balanced space in which the ritualist is the dead centre of attention. The Hollywood Bowl was capable of *resonating*, and not just for architectural reasons. Aesthetically it could also have been considered the world-navel of Hollywood, a Colosseum for Brookhaven's new Empire of the West Coast. There's no record of the actors seeing anything strange in a production which involved no sets and no apparent cameras: possibly they believed this was only to be a rehearsal.

The shooting process began at 9:30 in the morning. By noon, the film was complete and the fall of Faction Hollywood had begun.

The plot of *The Ghost Kingdom* is too involved to recount here [see under hollow spectaculars], but it was – and is – an action/mystical adventure set in Shogunate Japan, probably during the eighteenth century Tokugawa period. The story is split between the Mujun Samurai clan's battle to defend the village of Chikyu, and the schemes and counter-schemes of the royal court, where the witch-mother Lady Wakai is plotting to overthrow and devour the noble houses using the attacks of the other "witches" (i.e. westerners) as a lever to gain the dying King's ear. There are six central characters, and Brookhaven's intention was to use only six actors, the other cast – mostly Wakai's goblin-hordes – being entirely processor-generated.

The film was precisely balanced between the six roles, so it's no surprise that the arrival of a *seventh* character in its world-environment caused such an imbalance in the story. But then, Brookhaven should have been expected some form of outside intervention. He'd been marked as a target by the House Military ever since his person (or persons) had been compromised at his House of the Seven Gables.

The only record of the filming process is the film itself, so it's barely even worth debating whether the interior of the Hollywood Bowl genuinely became the arena of eighteenth century Japan or whether it has to be considered a kind of special effect. What's clear is that the lines spoken in the finished product don't exactly match the shooting script (available in paperback form from Cornell & Schulman, 1999). Watching the filming unfold in realtime, Brookhaven must have quickly spotted the occasional moments of bizarre, out-of-place dialogue, much of it either anachronistic

or seemingly from another film altogether. Some of it remains in the film (Baron Amatsumara's statement that the witch-horde's attack is 'just like 1834') and some of it ended up on the cutting room floor (Wakai's insistence that her prisoners should 'have their legs broken and [be] impaled on spikes,' judged altogether too harsh for a PG-rated movie).

It's unclear how long it took Brookhaven to realise what was going wrong, but around twenty-five minutes into the film he decided to become personally involved. There's a certain irony in this: Hollywood scriptwriter tradition insists that a good film requires an all-important twist, often involving the introduction of a new character, after the first twenty-five minutes. Yet in terms of actual footage Brookhaven only makes an impact at the conclusion of the "director's cut", the Mount Usu duel sequence.

His intervention doesn't appear to have made much difference to the rest of the film. If the early sections of the narrative feature the occasional incomprehensible line, then the later sections feature whole *scenes* not intended to be part of the process. There's a subplot about a band of assassins, obviously owing something to the Order of the White Peacock, hiding in the swamplands and reporting back to an unseen 'master' never mentioned anywhere else in the film. A short extra sequence suggests that the female warrior-noble Awaremi also works in a brothel specialising in 'tainted passions of the west', surrounded by white-faced serving women. One (badly-spliced) section flashes forward to events ten years in the future, as if the film has suddenly collided with its own sequel, presenting a time when most of the characters are dead and the offspring of one of the leading figures is, bizarrely, tending to a live oriental mammoth owned by the King of England.

In Brookhaven's later absence many of these sequences were retained for the final cinematic cut, which hardly endeared the film to its critics. Brookhaven himself failed to escape from Mount Usu.

***THE* HOMEWORLD [*Great Houses: Location, Major Powerbase (World)*]** Term loosely applied to the ancestral seat of the Great Houses, a locale whose relationship to the rest of the Spiral Politic is so obscure that very few attempts have been made to describe its exact location or even its relationship to known history. The Homeworld isn't simply a physical site but a specially-created space and time of its own, and although this enclave of the continuum has been given various names by various cultures it's now generally just known as *the* Homeworld. Even societies which have only the vaguest conception of it somehow acknowledge that it has a greater right to that title than any *other* homeworld.

It's often said that the defences around the Homeworld are part of history itself, or at least sculpted *out* of history, and although this may be true it's perhaps a mistake to think of them as purely military barriers. The Homeworld was removed from the rest of the Spiral Politic during the anchoring of the thread, when the children of the Great Houses re-processed themselves beyond the limits of normal biology and it's feasible that their entire world was "upgraded" in the same way. Although the Homeworld obviously isn't either alive or intelligent, its structure *does* seem to be wired with biodata, a subtle planetary bio-system which makes the Homeworld aware of the outside universe and able to monitor it from afar. In effect it's as if the world has been re-engineered to become an enormous receiver and processor of information. If history is a mere construction of the Houses, then it might be possible to think of the Homeworld as the core of that construction. Tellingly, in the Houses' own (barren) culture it's depicted as a great eye which sits outside time itself and constantly peers in.

Today there's little biological life left on the outer shell of the Homeworld. As the children of the Houses are apparently hominid in form, and show no outward signs of their deep-rooted connection to the continuum, many have suspected their appearance to be a front or an illusion. But the primal environment of the Homeworld could easily have supported a hominid species. Speculators who subscribe to the "morphic fields" theory claim that as the ancestors of the Houses were the first sentient creatures to evolve, this set some kind of universal pattern for the rest of known history, hence the proliferation of humanoid species across the Spiral Politic. It

seems a shaky assertion, however. Perhaps it's nothing to do with "morphic fields" at all, but a factor which took root in the history of the universe only when the Great Houses plotted it out. Whatever the reason, the physical nature of the Homeworld itself no longer seems an issue. It's been a long time since it could be described as anything as banal as a planet.

In truth there are currently Nine Homeworlds of the Great Houses, although only one can claim to be the Houses' genuine family throne, the other eight having been crypto-formed as a precaution shortly before the War broke out at the suggestion of House Lineacrux. This current volume assumes that the Homeworld generally *perceived* to be the original is in fact the genuine article, although in fairness it must be said that this by no means certain.

***THE* HOUSE MILITARY [*Major Power*]** Long before the War actually began, the Great Houses were well aware that the future was nowhere near as reassuring as they'd designed it to be. Prior to the last Pre-War millennium, there was no real military faction within the Houses at all: while each bloodline had its own constabulary, generally drawn from the ranks of the Homeworld's servitor-classes, these "troops" were largely ceremonial (a society with virtually no desires has virtually no crime) and were sworn to preserve the security of the ruling Houses simply because tradition demanded that somebody should be on hand to do it. Whenever some intervention in the outside universe was necessary, insubstantial sub-matter constructions – the *casts* – were projected to the relevant destination to carry out the Houses' dirty work. But in the decades before the first shots of the War were fired, all this began to change, partly due to the great unrest which many now believe was caused by the Houses' prescient "flashes" of the conflict to come. It was in this period that the House Military had its roots.

The unrest wasn't helped by the various attempted invasions and intrusions which took place during this era, as a variety of doomed, deluded armies from the outside universe attempted to drill through the walls of causality which surrounded the Homeworld and land their forces in the Houses' midst. Naturally it was unthinkable that any of these incursions might succeed, but a generation earlier it would have been unthinkable that they should even *try*. It was almost as if the anxiety of the Houses had become obvious even to the lesser species, as if the god-like mask of the ruling Houses had momentarily slipped and revealed the pale, anxious faces underneath. On those few occasions when the invaders did at least succeed in landing their scouts or their spies, the constabularies proved to be laughably inadequate in face-to-face combat. The more rebellious Houses, who'd never even given their ambitions a second thought before, were quick to make political capital of this… which is to say for the first time they began to realise that there was such a thing as political capital. Even those who never would have considered joining overt "retrogressives" like House Paradox (later to become Faction Paradox) could agree that *some* change might be necessary. It was, quite simply, a matter of survival.

So it was that the House Military was born. To this day, there's still no single official military amongst the Houses: the Homeworld's official belief has always been that it acts as a single entity, and when War broke out it was implicitly understood that *all* the children of the Houses would be involved in the conflict. Rather, the term House Military is used to describe a coterie of the Houses, a collection of the bloodlines, some of them newly-bred during the War Era and some of them survivors of those who demanded a more aggressive stance in the centuries before the War began. Despite official doctrine there's a definite schism between the Great Houses *per se* and the House Military, and in the field, if not on the Homeworld itself, everybody recognises this fact. Naturally, even the Newbloods maintain that the Protocols of the Great Houses are all-important and that the principles of tradition must be upheld at all costs, yet their interpretation of those principles would undoubtedly be questioned by the Oldblood elders who never leave the grey, monumental, and now immensely well-defended walls of the Homeworld's capital.

[[▲ HOUSE MILITARY.]]

The schism continues to widen, and at present seems on the verge of becoming a form of class struggle, the soldiers of the House Military seeing themselves as the true and *active* upholders of the Homeworld's tradition. This "revolutionary" impulse has become so strong that it's even beginning to fracture military units entirely made up of Newbloods, the less subtle fighters feeling some resentment towards those of their own bloodlines who are elevated from the frontlines to become time-strategists (the strategists' work involving the delicate plotting of probabilities as much as "vulgar" combat). Two things are central to this schism. The first is environment: unlike the ruling Houses, the time-front troops have

accustomed themselves to being *perpetually* stationed in the outside universe, far beyond the protection of the Homeworld. No House mind, raised on the Homeworld behind the screens of specially-constructed defensive history, could experience the outside universe for so long without taking some of it into themselves. And the second factor is even more fundamental: the very *shape* of the troops.

When the agents of the House Military's early Waves went into battle they retained their age-old hominid (human-like) forms, but even then everybody knew it wouldn't last. All children of the Houses are capable of regenerating tissue, sometimes even reviving themselves from total body-death, and it had long been established that there was no need for a damaged body to re-grow itself in exactly the same form. The notion of *military regen* had already been tested, by a small number of select field-agents whose biologies were engineered so that with every re-birth their bodies would become stronger, faster, and better-equipped for whatever tasks might lay ahead. It was a concept which many in the House Military found difficult to accept, mostly because it actively *encouraged* them to jeopardise their lives. Death, or at least near-death, would be sought by those who wished to rapid-grow their bodies into more fitting variations… and the leaders of the military Houses must surely have seen that this would only attract troops to the kind of death-cult imagery already being used by Faction Paradox and the Celestis. (Their fears were well-founded. By the time of the Third Wave, forced regen missions – missions which required the ceremonial "killing" of every soldier in the unit, in order to trigger a transformation into a specially-designed body more suitable for the mission – were no longer just theoretical.)

But the military regen phase of the War was inevitable. Although at first these re-growths merely left the soldiers with enhanced bodies, with built-in resistance to the more blatant forms of post-nuclear warfare (for the frontline troops) or special temporal lobes designed to enhance communication with the Homeworld (in the case of comms officers), the process was soon refined. It wasn't long before soldiers were primed so that with every transformation they'd become less and less hominid, their bodies armoured against all known forms of enemy attack, with biological weapons systems "fitted as standard". When several Second Wave veterans began to notice hard vestigial organs attached to their spinal tissues, the

intermediary-level officers started to ask what kind of adjustments the ruling Houses had been making. The ruling Houses could only insist that although the ultimate regenerative forms of the soldiers would indeed be entirely non-hominid – no limbs, no visible head, each agent a self-contained and blast-proofed unit laced with time-sensitive tripwire nerve-endings – it would take many, many "little deaths" to turn the average soldier into that kind of a living war-machine. The troops could easily avoid this fate, said the elite, by simply not getting themselves killed.

Naturally, the schism just grew worse.

[[▲ HOUSE MILITARY Strategist Entarodora, in one of her less formal regen-bodies.]]

Today very few of the House Military can be found in the "classical" hominid form. Even low-ranking troops are likely to have experienced at least one forced regen mission, and the only soldiers who even resemble the rulers of the Homeworld are generally veterans of the older Waves, spies, elite go-betweens for the Great Houses, or just very very lucky. Of course, the thought-processes of soldiers who've spent any amount of time in these non-humanoid forms are vastly different to the thought-processes of the Oldblood Houses: the shape of the psyche is dictated *always* by the shape of the body (and by the shape of the tools which that body can use).

No political settlement will ever really be able to resolve these differences. Although the bodies employed by the troops may differ vastly from unit to unit, they're united by the fact that they're all combat-hardened and intrinsically hostile to the opposition. It's inevitable that this sensation, of having a skin which is in itself a fortress, should lead not only to resentment among the ranks but also to an increased level of paranoia and a greater tendency towards mistrust, a heightened sense of self. These feelings alone are enough to cause the military bloodlines to see the Oldblood Houses as fundamentally *different*, as weak, soft and ultimately untrustworthy.

Attempts by the ruling Houses to combat this tendency with rigid discipline have been counter-productive. The Houses are a long, long way from anything that might be called a civil war, as at the present rate it will still be centuries before any of the Newblood units might seriously think of taking their grievances to the rulers of the Homeworld itself. Then again, the War shows no sign of ending. Perhaps a form of revolution is inevitable, in the distant future. The two forms of House are already approaching the point of becoming separate races, despite the fact that they face an enemy which intends to destroy them both.

***THE* HOUSE OF LORDS [*Faction Paradox: Location (Eleven-Day Empire)*]** The New Palace of Westminster, like any such building, has its secrets. In the Eleven-Day Empire, the "shadow" of London occupied solely by the hierarchy of Faction Paradox, the Palace's House of Lords is the Faction's equivalent of the irresistible locked room.

In the original version of London, the Houses of Parliament – i.e. the House of Commons and the House of Lords – are built, or balanced, across two axes (land to river and from the Commons' Speaker's Chair to the Lords' Woolsack) so that whatever sits in the Lords should be the balance, the opposite of what sits in the Commons. In the Eleven-Day Empire's version the elder members of Faction Paradox sit in session in the Commons, which would suggest that whatever sits in the Lords has the power to overrule them. This may be why, despite their iconoclastic tendencies, the Mothers and Fathers of the Parliament won't cross the threshold and why nobody will admit to knowing what lives behind its doors.

Alternatively, the House of Lords may be the focus for the *loa*-spirits of the Empire. In the "real" London the House of Lords is made up of both Spiritual and Temporal Lords, who sit to the right and left of the throne respectively. Assuming that the Grandfather of House Paradox is technically the Speaker of the Commons, despite no longer actually existing, it's possible that the Grandfather represents the Temporal while something else contained within the Lords represents the Spiritual.

One person may have known, since she was the only recorded member of the Faction to have entered and left. However, Anastasia never spoke of what she encountered.

After her arrival in the Eleven-Day Empire, then-Cousin Anastasia spent a lot of her time at Westminster closeted with Father Dyavol, and talking to various Cousins of Russian origin as well as the various malcontents of Faction Paradox. Despite this, the Mothers and Fathers in the Commons were shocked when Anastasia stood from her place on the benches, grabbed the ceremonial speaker's mace and walked across the central lobby. She swung the mace three times and entered the House of Lords. It was considered to be an elaborate form of suicide.

She emerged an hour later, with blood smeared on her hands and face. Her white lace gown was dark red and one finger was missing. Back in the Commons, she leapt onto the tables and announced that the Thirteen-Day Republic had been born. She and her fellow revolutionaries left at once, breaking away from the Faction and setting up a new form of Parliament (or, rather, a *Soviet*) in the Malachite Room at St. Petersburg.

Nobody has since attempted to follow in her footsteps and enter the House of Lords, so its contents remain a mystery. During the era of the Thirteen-Day Republic it was briefly suggested that whatever lives in the Lords, it can grant Faction members the right to leave the Eleven-Day Empire and create Faction colonies of their own: but following the bloody demise of the Republic this hardly seems to be a blessing and nobody else has been willing to take the risk.

***THE* HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN [*Lesser Species*: *Location (Posthuman Period)*]** The House of the Rising Sun was actually a physical, stationary building located on the most prosperous of the twenty-eight-thousand worlds of the posthuman period known as New Earth, the House being described by its founder and proprietress Mrs. Foyle as a 'brothel for the discerning time-active gentleman or lady'. However, the interior was modelled precisely on the dimensional dynamic of one of the Great Houses' time-ships and its foundations are thought to be connected to the ancient history-spanning labyrinth used in pre-history by exiles from the Homeworld of the Houses. The House of the Rising Sun therefore extended (and, indeed, still extends) beyond the physical, three-dimensional walls of the building proper. Its architecture crosses time and space, intersecting with a number of other venues on different worlds and in different time periods.

There's never been a precise count of the sub-brothels attached to the House. In her private diaries (made public during a number of celebrity trials in which she was peripherally involved), even Mrs. Foyle herself admits to losing track of them all. The temporal anchoring was imperfect and the interior tended to shift locations unexpectedly. Clients would arrive for a quiet evening's relaxation in the House and instead find themselves flayed alive by the time winds, shifted into an alternative *eigenstate* or – in one or two extreme instances – deposited beyond the event horizon and into the realms of extra-dimensional abominations outside time and space. Other unfortunates were able to find their way in, but unable to find their way out again as the internal dimensions of the local bordello folded in on each other. None of this was good for business.

The House of Rising Sun itself managed to lose money very quickly. Mrs Foyle's fascination with atmosphere and the exotic was a major factor in repelling potential clients. The House itself was a gloomy, gothic building, slunk out with the overpowering, sickly scent of black narcissus, decorated with erotic artwork and sculpture which left many clients suffering traumatic night terrors for years to come. Mrs Foyle had also procured a number of her "girls" from Madame Sosostris, the Barnum of Montmartre, again displaying an exotic fascination which amounted to commercial suicide. She failed to anticipate that the demand for sexual pleasure from

Skinless Celeste, the *Auto-Erotic Sisters of New Zealand (Conjoined at the Hips)* or *Felicity Mamoulian and her Unexpected Teeth* would appeal to anyone other than a very narrow constituency of her clients. She was simply not destined to be a brothel-keeper. And at the same time, she was making a number of contacts which would be useful for her inevitable career change. From the start, she may even have considered the brothel a mere dry run for a more important venture, the so-called Remonstration Bureau.

One abiding mystery relating to Mrs Foyle and the House of the Rising Sun is her own attitude towards sex. In her diaries she makes frequent disparaging remarks about this ‘messy’ or ‘vile’ activity and even proudly claims to have retained her own virginity.

***THE* HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES [*Remote: Location/Event (Earth, C20)*]** With biodata in perennially short supply during War-time, the House Military's *Army of One* project seemed the ideal way to mass-manufacture agents and soldiery: a process of diffracting the timeline of a single individual in order to generate a complete strikeforce, the original experiment created the army of Cwejen still in commando service in the mid-worlds of the War. Yet although the original Army of One project at the Gauntlet was an unmitigated success, subsequent attempts have met with complete (and often biologically unpleasant) failure. The Houses officially put this down to the lack of a suitable subject, although it's difficult to forget the maxim of Faction Paradox's more ritualised science which states that 'any great experiment will only work once', something which admittedly seems to contradict every known definition of the word "experiment". It's worth noting, however, that the Army of One concept was later stolen – one might almost say "re-made for the big screen" – by the Faction's Los Angeles franchise, Faction Hollywood.

According to local War-lore there was once a man from Newport Beach who edited himself into six elder brothers, by diffracting his timeline at five-year intervals so that by the age of 41 he had siblings seemingly aged 46, 51, 56 and so on. It was an accomplished piece of engineering, defying many accepted theories of chronostatic discharge, and it was done essentially from egotism as well as for the sake for a cheap joke. The subject was, predictably, Michael Brookhaven, who'd taken the confirmation name of Cousin Gable and now seemed determined to gain a House of his own ("House" not only meaning "bloodline", but also referring to the retreat where he had his own private Cutting Room, to which he would return whenever the parties and orgies of the Los Angeles circuit briefly palled). He called the estate *Hawthorne*, and he staffed it with a butler, a gardener, two odd-job men, a chef and a valet, all of whom were iterations of himself at a variety of ages and in a variety of weights. In doing this he created what he believed to be a haven of ultimate safety, maintained by staff all dedicated to his survival, the theory being that if anything happened to him then logically they'd never come into existence.

In actuality he created a trap, which he was to escape only by the closest of margins and at the expense of sacrificing at least thirty years of his life.

When the House Military's agent Christopher Rodonanté Cwej began his campaign against Faction Hollywood, he was to seize upon the dislocation of Brookhaven's timeline not as the defensive strength which Brookhaven had imagined but as a weakness in its own right. Who, Cwej reasoned, is entirely loyal to himself? A man of thirty lives to cripple the sixty-year-old he has yet to become, conducting a form of betrayal no less certain for being concealed by time. It's hardly a coincidence that the Houses chose Cwej as their agent, when Cwej himself had been the timeline donor for the original Army of One experiment. It can be assumed that Cwej's own experiences with multi-personification, albeit engineered laterally rather than linearly, may have given him this insight into the potential weakness of Brookhaven's "brotherhood". According to Gauntlet sources Cwej is known to have commented that he would 'cheerfully have killed Damen [commander of the Army of One] with his own hands for making his [Cwej's] foibles and sins external, obvious and undeniable'. Rather than surrounding himself with yes-men, Brookhaven had placed himself in the care of those six individuals most likely to desire his own position, to feel a deep-rooted resentment for their smug young iteration.

Cwej began by picking off the eldest Brookhaven, the butler "Rhett", framing him for Hollywood's Black Dahlia murders of the late 1940s. With Rhett imprisoned and possibly facing the electric chair – an end which the other slices of Brookhaven's life could see awaiting them in turn – Cwej began to deal with the others, offering them lives of their own separate from Brookhaven's timeline, debatably a breach of the Protocols of Linearity although at least within House capabilities. One, the former gardener, is known to have accepted the offer and later to have established one of the breakaway Remote groups. It must be supposed that it was he who supplied Cwej with information pertaining to Brookhaven's forthcoming *Ghost Kingdom* project, which would eventually lead to the Hollywood Bowl shooting and Cwej's final confrontation with the original Brookhaven during the Mount Usu duel sequence.

The fate of the other brothers is uncertain. Although by this point in his career Cwej had certainly killed in the Houses' service, he retained a predilection for mercy which was rated as 'annoying' in his personnel file. It's possible that before his intervention in *The Ghost Kingdom* Cwej made some promise or provision for the brothers to be repatriated in House

Military service. But in the event of any of the brothers attempting to report for duty, current standing House instructions are for them to be killed on sight. After the Hollywood Bowl episode Brookhaven's biodata is regarded as dangerous even at such a remove.

HUMANITY [*Lesser Species: Participants*] Bloodline said to be of particular interest to the factions involved in the War, for no reason which has ever been properly explained. Human (and, indeed, posthuman) observers have suggested that there may be some historic link between humanity and the Great Houses, hence the apparent physical similarity between human and House lines: but the counter-argument is that Earth has *no* special importance, that *all* inhabited planets are of some significance and that humanity only believes itself to be "special" because it chooses to be noticed. By the same logic it could be argued that there's no significant resemblance between humanity and the Houses at all, and that every species focuses on the aspects of House biology which it finds most familiar.

However, humanity is worth noticing for one very important reason. More than any other known species, its history is entirely impossible.

The pre-human line became recognisably sentient around 4,000,000 BC, at which point proto-australopithecines emerged from the earliest hominid forms and the "new breed" reached the point where it could begin to symbolise. Perhaps the truest test of sentience, a species which can symbolise can understand the concept of something *representing* something else: tools then become a possibility, the tool being a symbolic extension of the arm, as does the cultural tool of language. Further developments followed, the species becoming so obsessed with its newfound idea of *culture* that the concept of symbolisation was taken to its logical conclusion. Thus, it became the prevalent belief among human societies that the body itself was a tool, an extension of the "real" inner self. The result were belief-systems centred on the idea of a soul or spirit, and as scheduled this became the cornerstone of most human progress for years to come.

Anthropologically speaking, it's clear from this evidence what the ultimate fate of humanity should have been. With every society believing itself to be made up of spirits-trapped-in-flesh, from humankind's earliest years there was a clear unconscious desire to leave its collective body behind and achieve a non-corporeal state. On some level *all* culture conditioned humanity to this idea. Indeed, most of the religious texts produced in this

period revolved around the concept of a spiritual Heaven, a place of paradise unburdened by flesh and blood, not a literal prediction of future worlds like the City of the Saved but a self-fulfilling prophecy and a guarantee that the species would one day create such worlds… given the chance. Ultimately humankind had no option but to turn itself into a culture of pure intelligence and/or pure information, the urge not exactly being *in* their genetic makeup but certainly being an inevitable genetic by-product. It was the factor which had, at least subconsciously, been driving their sense of progress ever since they first learned to speak.

Things went according to plan at least as far as the eighteenth century AD, by which time humanity was ready to launch into its industrial era. It was at this point that various War factions began to take an interest in Earth's noosphere, although these embassies were limited in scope and surprisingly little impact was made on the native culture despite the affiliation of various humans with "secret orders" like Faction Paradox (at that point perceived by their contacts on Earth as new spirit-cults for the Age of Reason). Predictably, as communications and technology improved the rate of development increased: progress is usually exponential in hominid cultures. The period between 1700 and 1800 AD saw a greater level of innovation than any other age in history, the period between 1800 and 1900 saw the speed of progress increase once again, and the period between 1900 and 2000 was faster still. It soon became obvious that if the rate of change continued to increase, then logically, the human species had to reach a point of catastrophe – not necessarily a negative one – where it would simply no longer be able to function at an animal level.

By the end of the twentieth century there was sufficient technology on the planet to begin shifting human consciousness into alternative forms; hundreds of millions of humans were already spreading themselves, or at least their information-selves, across the globe on a daily basis: scientific research was mere months away from developing a method of biologically "mainlining" data; and to any anthropologist it would have seemed that humanity was about to reach its crisis point and fulfil its genetic programming, abandoning the biological model forever.

And then, suddenly, everything stopped.

By the early-to-mid twenty-first century, intelligence-form technology was certainly in existence. All humanity needed was the will. But somehow, after millions of years of effort, the will had unexpectedly vanished. On the brink of finding its own personal kind of enlightenment, it was as if the human species had backed down and decided to enter a period of stagnation instead. By 2030 it was evident that the rate of scientific/cultural progress was slowing. Between 2040 and 2100 virtually nothing of great importance was created, or rather, nothing was *envisioned*. Old technological ideas were put into practice on larger scales than ever before, but nothing occurred which was even a fraction as revolutionary as the steam revolution of the early 1800s or the computer generation of the 1990s. Though budding technologies were streamlined and commercialised, the cultural impact of these changes was, amazingly, almost nil. The human species was somehow moving towards a stagnancy every bit as profound as that which had plagued the Great Houses in the Pre-War Era.

No sociological theory has explained this. To put the stasis down to economic factors, or political divisions, or minor changes to the planet's environment would be ridiculous. The fact is that within the space of one generation, humanity stopped in its tracks and *by doing so doubled back on every step it had ever made as well as every genetic imperative it had ever known*. Mundane space travel started to become commonplace, and humanity entered its expansionist phase by spreading out from Earth towards neighbouring world-chains, but the principles were barely different to those which had fuelled the early space explorations from the USSR in the 1950s, America in the 1960s and Britain in the 1970s. Instead of taking inspiration from its newfound freedom and creating daring new utopias beyond the boundaries of the old homeworld, humanity simply repeated all the mistakes it had made on Earth, The drive to move faster, to go further, to leave the limitations of the flesh behind was lost almost overnight. Even the much-hyped development of nanotechnology, a "vulgar" technology by the Great Houses' standards but at least a *novel* one, failed to trigger the anticipated cultural revolution.

Officially, humanity's lapse into the banal remains an unexplored area. It's been suggested that as with the NAFAL engines which first propelled it out of the solar system, outside interference played a part. A cynical mind

might point out that humanity's progress seemed to end just at the moment where it might have had adverse effects on the Spiral Politic. Human society was nowhere near the point of developing the kind of time-technology used by the Great Houses, of course, but the humans could at least imagine such a technology. If humanity's fast-forward progress had continued for just ten more years, then the human species would have been able to *think* things which had just never occurred to the Houses.

The era of human history after the twenty-first century is generally known as the *later period*, which seems ironic as this era – lasting for ten-million years[6], until the fall of Earth and the rise of the posthuman hegemony – actually makes up the bulk of humankind's existence. In that span of time there were countless empires, endless alliances and interminable wars, but in the final analysis all of them were more or less pointless. It could be argued that when humanity turned away from its genetic destiny in the twenty-first century, the species effectively came to an end and ensured that all the wars it had ever fought, not to mention all the wars it ever would fight, had no logic and no purpose whatsoever. Several of the posthuman sects are widely expected to do better, but analysis is difficult thanks to the "causally remote" nature of their civilisations.

***THE* IMPERATOR PRESIDENCY [*Great Houses: Event/Group (Pre-War Era)*]** The Great Houses have, according to their own doctrine, observed and maintained the metastructure of history for ten-million years: a number so round that many feel it must have been picked by the Houses out of thin air, a purely arbitrary figure chosen just to suggest "a very long time". True or not, it's unquestionable that for aeons before the War the Houses themselves existed in a state of almost total stasis. There was no natural reproduction on the Homeworld; no death, other than the slowest, greyest and least spectacular kind; no argument, no injustice, no progress and very little actual *culture*. And yet around a millennium before the War began, tiny imperfections began to appear in the great status quo, defects in Homeworld society which would eventually culminate in the War itself. How did this happen?

The Homeworld's breeding-engines were supposedly infallible, geared to produce generation after generation of flawless academicians and observers, but around twelve-hundred years before the War the first faults *did* begin to appear. It's tempting to put this down to simple entropy – the machines had supposedly been in operation for ten-million years – although the Homeworld, with its unusual relationship to the rest of time, had been primed to *resist* entropy. Very little was said about these irregularities in the new generation, and as they only produced very minor eccentricities it was supposed that nothing would come of it. Besides which, the ruling Houses had no experience of even admitting that something might be wrong. Surely, the great academies of the Houses could iron out any little problems in its new members' biodata?

Things took a startling turn for the worse around three-hundred years later, during the cataclysmic Imperator Presidency, the first shockingly direct contact with the outside universe in living memory. House Dvora was a House of respect, its bloodline one of the cornerstones of the ruling six, and yet this seemingly reasonable line had produced Imperator: the brutal, mono-maniacal God-Emperor who tore through the polite barriers between the Homeworld and the rest of history to lead a *realpolitik* crusade into the outside universe. He demanded involvement in the affairs of the lesser species; he demanded a pre-emptive re-forming of the Spiral Politic; he demanded that the Protocols should be ripped from the

Homeworld, and that history should be adapted to suit the Houses' own needs, particularly (it was implied) the needs of House Dvora. He actively recruited from the lesser species, not actually welcoming them into his bloodline but using them as extensions of his will, playing on their expectations that the rulers of the Houses would be inscrutable, unstoppable Gods. That be developed a cult of personality around himself wasn't as shocking as the fact that he *had* such a personality.

If there really had been a serious flaw in his biodata (and even then, after the carnage and the confusion, the other ruling Houses felt that it would go against tradition to check) then such flaws must have been present in the systems for far longer than anyone had liked to imagine. In retrospect it's apparent that there were four major "mutations" produced in the Imperator's generation, all of whom were to have a significant impact on the Spiral Politic – the others included the Grandfather of House Paradox and the individual now known as the War King – but the Imperator was by far the most ambitious, the most prepared to see the universe burn in the name of his own crusade, a true war criminal rather than a petty interferer. After he was denounced among the Houses by the Order of the Weal he simply removed his loyal supporters from the Homeworld altogether. His followers and mercenaries caused havoc among hundreds upon hundreds of foreign cultures, all the time claiming (sometimes with justification) that they were doing it for the greater good of universal civilisation, and suddenly all eyes were on the Homeworld for the first time in history.

With no real idea how they should act, the ruling Houses panicked. Despite the massive technologies available to them it took an absurdly long time for them to move against the former head of their Presidency. In a desperate attempt to pacify the Spiral Politic, to prove to the outside universe that these "gods" had a code of justice, the Imperator was publicly and ceremonially executed: the first deliberate killing of a Great House member since the foundation of House society. It was supposed to quell any thoughts the lesser species might have of attacking the Homeworld (such attacks would he doomed to failure, naturally, but could have an adverse effect on causality), yet on the Homeworld itself the plan backfired horribly. House society was already in shock from what it had seen during the Presidency's reign, suddenly faced with the concept that violent death

was something to which they could be a party as well as the lesser species, so when the ruling Houses ordered the slaughter of one of their own kind it only increased their anxiety. The Imperator almost seemed to have been proved right by his execution.

The Imperator crisis was the moment of catastrophe for the Houses. It triggered the rise of the intervention groups, fuelled the creation of Faction Paradox and may even have been a portent, a retro-reflection, of the future War itself. From that point on Dvora was known as a *Newblood* House, the first House to have bred such an obvious mutation despite its reasonably long lineage. Just a few hundred years after the fall of the Imperator, House society was changing so rapidly that new factions and new alliances were developing by the decade, a frighteningly short span of time in Homeworld terms. By the time the War became visible on the horizon, and the Houses began to understand the exact nature of their future enemy, the traditions of the Homeworld were still more or less intact but it had become clear that any of them could be sacrificed at a moment's notice. Certainly, in the final years leading up to the War – the armament phase – the paranoia of the ruling Houses had reached such a point that behind closed doors, the elite of society were quite prepared to discuss weapons which could eradicate entire cultures from the face of history. Such a thing would have been unthinkable, just nine-hundred years earlier.

The Imperator himself would no doubt have been proud.

INTERCREATIONALS [*Terminology*] There are space-going species: hardy seed pods with great, leaf-like photosynthetic sails. Then there are the species of the interstices *between* spaces: things which have evolved in a wholly non organic environment, to thrive in the temporal wakes of the timeships and feed on the fallout of the War. Then there are those for whom space and time are tiny distractions: the intercreationals, presences so vast and fundamental that they're generally ignored altogether.

An average universe, at roughly two-thirds of its maximum pre-collapse expansion, is approximately 157,000,000,000 light-years in circumference and 25,000,000,000 temporal years in radius. It's known that there are many secondary and tertiary universes, brother and sister domaines, each deriving ultimately from the same stretch of De Sitter space-time. The recognised universe – the universe familiar to the perceptions of most living things (and even, perhaps, the perceptions of the time-ships) – is one such secondary domaine, a "growth" originating in the proto-continuum.

It's also known that a variety of hyper-animal forms inhabit the non-spaces between these universes, as fish inhabit the water and move between bubbles of air. They range from the Swimmers, which may be regarded as mobile predatory universes, to the Leviathans. These intercreationals were until recently regarded (if they were regarded at all) as essentially large stupid objects, an amusing if irrelevant fact about the regions beyond the Spiral Politic, although recent discoveries by the Homeworld's Seventh Wave has shed disturbing new light on the Leviathans' existence. It's been rumoured that the near-legendary House agent/assassin/science-guerrilla Robert Scarratt has now been assigned to investigate the possibilities of intercreationals, although this could well be a cover for his House's more alarming research on Ordifica.

INTERVENTION [*Great Houses: Culture (Pre-War Era)*] The rise and fall of the Imperator Presidency was the turning-point in the story of the Great Houses: thanks to the Imperator's bloody crusade in the outside universe, it was the point when the lesser species began to understand not only that the Great Houses existed but that the Houses thought of them as being "lesser" by default. And as the Imperator had proved to these other cultures that their elders-and-betters could be as aggressive, as ruthless and as megalomaniacal as any other species, it's hardly surprising that the Houses should have begun to develop an unprecedented paranoid streak. Thanks to the Protocols of Linearity those parts of the outside universe which had been overrun by the Imperator were now linked to the Homeworld in "real time", and the Spiral Politic was more political than ever before.

It didn't exactly change Homeworld history. Until that point the Houses had refused to believe there was any history on the Homeworld, history being the domain of "vulgar" cultures, but now all of a sudden their defences had been breached and history had leaked in. As the centuries fled by, there was an increasing feeling among the lesser Houses that the Homeworld should – heresy of heresies – actually interfere in the affairs of the outside universe. *We*, said the Newbloods, *should intervene in the affairs of the lesser species before they intervene in ours.*

However hard the ruling Houses tried to fight these tendencies, there was no denying that they now had to deal with something they'd never known before: political factions. Suddenly there were "movements" and "protest elements" on all sides, intervention groups wanting diplomatic relations with the lesser species, intervention groups wanting complete *control* of the lesser species, counter-intervention groups like the Imperator's own bastard offspring the Order of the Weal… it was during this period that House (later Faction) Paradox was founded, and that a short-lived rival Presidency was set up on the semi-developed world of Dronid (a location which would one day witness the opening shots of the War).

It was inevitable that under this kind of pressure, the ruling Houses themselves would begin to adopt interventionist tendencies. And it was inevitable that this would only make the problem worse. Given that *some*

outside force seemed to be acting against the status quo, there was a sense that something might be happening in the Spiral Politic which the Houses just hadn't noticed. Before long history was being re-modelled so that whenever a species even came close to developing time-active technology, House agents would (at best) be sent to keep a close eye on events or (at worst) remove the offending technologies, and occasionally their creators, from the timeline. Even the eventual imprisonment of House Paradox's founder-Grandfather can be interpreted not so much as an attempt to suppress the "revolutionary" elements on the Homeworld, but more as a sign that the ruling Houses were now prepared to be utterly pragmatic in their attempts to keep the Homeworld under control.

The great irony, of course, is that shortly before the War began the most influential interventionists – sensing, perhaps, that the War wouldn't go well for them – grouped together *en masse* and removed themselves from the timeline altogether, distancing themselves from the Spiral Politic to become the Lords of the Celestis. It was a typically practical move, but it also ensured that the Homeworld would remember them only as traitors, the first rats to desert the sinking ship.

INVESTIGATORS [Celestis: Group (Present)]

'This is the universe. Big, isn't it?' – Investigator Eighteen.

Although the Celestis have removed themselves from the universe in an attempt to avoid the effects of the War, many of them still wish to dabble in the affairs of the Great Houses by manipulating events from a distance. To this end they established an "agency" to do their work, and manned it with a number of specially-bred Investigators. These Investigators are assassins as much as detectives, generally taken from the creches of Mictlan and harshly educated through their short childhoods to induce total, psychotic obedience to their Celestial masters.

Needless to say, this treatment tends to lead to warped personalities, early mental burnout and a hard core of incredibly dangerous rebel Investigators. In spite of the dangers of their line of work, more Investigators die at the hands of their colleagues and their superiors than from any other cause. Frequent purges and forced personality reboots keep the agency fresh.

Physical appearance is a malleable concept when it comes to the Investigators. Memetically implanted aperture technology allows them to move through time, space and any other accessible dimensions at will, and their default appearance tends to be a humanoid gap in history, through which the continuual strata and other such phenomena can be seen. Their potential for shape-changing and mimicry is limited only by the body-mass at their disposal, but in times of crisis or threat they tend towards armoured, insect-like battleforms (almost certainly an atavistic response to the identity-destroying techniques of Celestis training). On the rare occasions when an Investigator's ability to shift form has been neutralised, they appear to be almost featureless humanoids, living mannequins without a costume to wear.

[[▲ INVESTIGATOR Ninety-Six (formerly Investigator Ninety-Eight)]]

One other notable point is the very simple hierarchy within the agency. Investigators are numbered, with the most senior Investigator being

named One. If investigators have any other names then none have ever been discovered. But though this might suggest a lack of identity, it doesn't stop those who are ascended to Investigator status from the ranks of the dead (unusual, but not unknown) retaining noticeable quirks from their past lives. Sadistic or suicidal Investigators have been recorded, as have several who seem to enjoy stabbing their fellow Investigators in the back just for the thrill of it. Investigator Thirty-One insists on travelling with a retinue of "gypsy" servants specially tailored to his own needs, while an even more eccentric member of the clique is Investigator Eighteen, who's often dispatched to *escort* servants from the outside universe once their mortal lives expire… especially if those servants come from sensitive, House-monitored worlds in the middle of the Warzone.

Whenever he collects a new servant, it amuses Eighteen to put the dead victim on trial, showing the subject the entire scope of the Spiral Politic and then forcing him to defend his right to exist before a jury composed of a thousand members of his own world's most famous dead. Of course, the entire procedure is a sham: the court and its jury are merely an artifice created by Eighteen himself, and whatever happens in the trial the subject will still end up as a slave in Mictlan. Investigator humour is a strange and disturbing thing.

INVESTIGATOR THIRTY-ONE [*Celestis: Participant (Present)*]
Investigator Thirty-One is one of the few Celestis assassin forms taken from among the ranks of the dead rather than produced in Mictlan's creches, and it's believed that while he lived he was deliberately marked out by the Celestis (specifically Lord Halved Birth) to enter the Investigator clique. *All* Investigators are killers by their very nature, but in this case the instinct was there even during life. Thirty-One was formerly the Great Nobodaddy, master assassin of the posthuman era of history, an age notorious for its intrigues, blood-feuds and campaigns of aristocratic murder, Nobodaddy claimed descent from the gypsy-stock of old Earth, although given the amount of race-mixing and genetic manipulation which had occurred in humanity by the posthuman period it's doubtful this claim actually meant anything. Nonetheless, in an age when murder and artistry were intertwined his insistence on an ancient heritage provided him with a useful trademark.

Reborn as an Investigator, Thirty-One has retained this attachment to a colourful genetic past, ironic for a being which no longer has any genes. Unusually for an Investigator he has a coterie of his own servants, thought to have been provided by Lord Halved Birth shortly before Thirty-One left the Lord's patronage, and he apparently perceives these servants as his own "gypsy clan". Thirty-One seriously seems to believe that they represent some kind of distinct bloodline, even though like most of Mictlan's servant-class, they remain faceless and devoid of any personality.

The most effective use of Thirty-One and his retinue was his involvement in the siege at Poenari in the late fifteenth century, where all the evidence suggests that the *voivode*-prince Vlad III made some form of deal with the Celestis. Thirty-One's gypsy clan would have been well-suited to the environment, genuine gypsy stock being endemic to the area. Indeed, witnesses to the group's presence at the siege detected nothing unusual about a band of gypsies being in the region of the mountain fortress at Poenari, although the claim that they 'stayed out of sight' suggests the fifteenth-century mind had to struggle to explain the servants' lack of visible identity. With the castle under siege from the Turks, it was Thirty-One's group which assisted Vlad's seemingly impossible escape from the siege before sending him on his way across the mountains to Hungary. It

was presumably for these life-saving services that Vlad agreed to take on the Celestis's Mark of Indenture, a deal which Vlad apparently did everything he could to escape, and although he later became as faceless as Thirty-One's own band there's some suggestion it was ultimately Thirty-One who dispatched the former voivode over five-hundred years later.

The siege of Poenari may have ended in a Turkish victory, but it's known that the Turks suffered unusual casualties in the process. Although several folk-tales from the Islamic world describe Vlad III facing the enemy forces at the castle with the rage of a great beast (or suchlike), dressed in the armour of an infidel God-King, this seems unlikely as Vlad would have worn minimal armour as he made his escape with his escort. It's far more probable that it was *Thirty-One* who fought the Islamic invaders. An Investigator dressed for war would certainly appear as a bestial King in armour to eastern eyes, and could easily have eradicated an entire Turkish advance force, but if the mission brief was to allow Vlad to survive then Thirty-One would only have fought for long enough to allow the prince to escape. The fact that there were survivors at all may be testament to this.

To this day, when Thirty-One manifests in battle-form his armour is marked with the same symbols of "heritage" to which he's always been attracted: signs and gypsy-markings whose meaning was entirely lost to history by the posthuman period, smeared haphazardly across his carapace. As he grows more erratic with time, many of his fellow Investigators are starting to see his obsession as a tragic joke which is slowly degenerating into farce.

***HOUSE* IXION [*Great Houses: House (Pre-War Era)*]** Headquarters of the Order of the Weal, the counter-intelligence service and instrument of state power which held sway among the Houses for nearly seven-hundred years after the fall of the megalomaniac Imperator Presidency. Ironically it was the Imperator himself who'd founded the Order, and the Imperator himself who'd chosen its first and greatest head: Chatelaine Thessalia, of the obscure House Ixion. The bloodline of Ixion had already vanished in the Diaspora, leaving only a line of caretakers to manage the affairs of the House. With no stake in the politics of the day, Ixion must have offered the Imperator the perfect opportunity to remould a House in terms of his own ideology. In practice Ixion faded from recorded history, and its barely-occupied chapterhouse on the fringes of the occupied Homeworld – at the point where the civilisation of the Houses gives way to the mountainous, often-ignored natural terrain of what was once a perfectly normal world – became the physical base for the Order's counter-terrorist operations.

The Order was structured according to a simple hierarchy, with all operational matters controlled directly by the Chatelaine and her heir apparent (this was never a formal position, her allegiance shifting from individual to individual as her mood took her… Thessalia was nothing if not unpredictable). The House Ixion staff, drawn mainly from malcontents who'd left the larger Houses, were combat-trained but worked mainly in the administration of day-to-day activities. The Chatelaine's elite bodyguard of *myrmidons*[7], better-trained and equipped than the ceremonial "comic opera" servitors of the other Houses, also served as shock troops in an emergency and were permanently stationed on board the four time-ships the Order had at its disposal. There were perhaps 170 active members of the Order at any one time, most of them stationed at House Ixion.

At the same time, the Order cultivated renegades and radicals from across the Homeworld. Its strength lay in the large, informal network of spies and sleepers, whose identities were known only to the Chatelaine and her inner circle. The Order was particularly keen to recruit "mutant" agents. Though it never operated its own breeding-engine, its preoccupation with unstable bloodlines may have prompted it to make subtle alterations to the programme dynamics of the engines of the active Houses, just to see what

would happen. Charged with maintaining the status quo and thus assumed to be inherently conservative, in truth the Order courted troublemakers and endorsed radical political views, presumably believing that in troubled times one had to be pro-active in order to preserve the establishment. It was often attractive to would-be-cultists, and unquestionably House Ixion diverted a number of talented individuals away from joining House Paradox or the intervention groups.

Following the death of Thessalia and the decline of the Order of the Weal, Ixion became an empty, desolate House. Though it's still technically recorded as active, the Ixion bloodline no longer exists and it's left up to servitor-staff to tend the physical shell of the chapterhouse… at least when the chapterhouse can't tend to itself. There's some evidence, however, that the babels briefly used during the Lethean Campaign were reared there, an ideal locale since it's generally wise to keep babels as far away from civilisation as possible.

***THE* JALLAMA REED TRANSMISSIONS [*Remote: Culture (Early War Era)*]** A series of deep-impact, icon-intense transmissions, engineered by the Great Houses and planted in the media of the Broken Remote colony on Fallahal with the intention of castrating the Remote's outward-looking, expansionist tendencies. Generally speaking the transmissions from Remote media systems don't follow any form of narrative structure (the Remote's built-in receivers pump signals straight into the reasoning/symbolisation sections of the brain, which makes narrative altogether too *slow* for them), but the *Jallama Reed* transmissions nonetheless introduced a significant new icon to the Remote's culture in a series of direct, rapid-fire images. Still held on datacoil by House Military units, for use against any future Remote colonies, all the transmissions follow the same basic pattern but all find new ways to turn the trivia of colony life into vast, melodramatic *tableaux*.

The first image in the series, *Jallama Reed is the New Pioneer*, establishes that Reed is a dynamic young colonist who works for the Remote social-cohort which handles remunerative justice after small non-fatal skimmer-car accidents, heroically assisting those who own the vehicles to receive recompense and often daringly, dazzlingly arguing their cases before the attendants of the central media-system itself. She wears the powerful armour of all elite Remote shock-troops, yet her face is specifically sculpted to make sure the audience realises that at heart she's a vulnerable and troubled human being, 'just like all of us'. The second image, *Jallama Reed is Life Under Siege*, sees her risk her position and her sanity to run the bureaucratic gauntlet associated with heavy-transporter dereliction petitioners, while all the time beset by personal demons which take the form of non-sequentially-arranged filing indexes. Subsequent images include *Jallama Reed is the Model of Tragedy*, in which the everyday interactions between Reed and her co-workers while they stand at the drinks dispenser are turned into an epic opera, and *Jallama Reed is the Avatar of Us All*, in which Reed fights for the rights of the less fortunate and less attractive in society – depicted as misshapen, overweight lumps of biomass, mutant offspring of the Remote's remembrance tanks – by bravely helping them with their recompense-indemnification procedures despite their unpleasant appearances.

(Jallama Reed herself, though designed to provoke a reaction as an "everyman" or "everywoman", is not only striking in her own appearance but also seems to weigh less than 35 kilograms without her armour. The Great Houses were well aware that inadequately nourished human beings would make far more passive subjects, and therefore encouraged the concept of Reed-as-ideal-figure.)

The *Jallama Reed* transmissions were an integral part of the Houses' designs for Fallahal and exploited the culture's mass-psyche by being enormously reassuring to those Remote who received them: any colonist trapped in a menial role could justify his or her existence by believing that he or she was in fact engaged in a dangerous, challenging, *important* quest for truth. As a result, the Remote's urge to look outside the confines of their own small social-circles was minimised, the "listeners" becoming increasingly introspective and self-involved with every new transmission. However, critics of rapid-image media would doubtless point out that the impact of *Jallam Reed* pales in comparison with the Great Houses' New Young Gods project.

JUNGLE CHILDREN [*House Military: Engineered Participants (Early War Era)*] There are the tales of paradoxical children raised by humans: the Hauserkinder. Then there are tales of the things others substitute for children: the *changelings* of European folklore. Finally there are the children abandoned to the Other: the children of the jungle, the infants of the outside.

Considered in its most reductionist form, such children are given over to inferior species to be raised in primitive environments, with the expectation that their biodata will take on (or encapsulate) characteristics of their ferocious foster-landscape. In Earth fiction the most common foster-parents are wolves or apes, while to the Houses – as above, so below – the most common fictional foster is humanity. In men, runs the myth, are the Homeworld's hidden passions outlined: unrestrained by House Protocol. The fallacy of this, in the face of the unrestrained impulses of the War Era Houses, speaks for itself. But irrespective of the myth, as far as is known only House Arpexia ever had the bad grace to attempt to translate a harmless (if naive) folk-story into hard fact. It's one of the minor, less threatening, paradoxes of history that in doing so they were engineering the events which had already given their name to the appearance of other lost children and time-orphans, for as it happened they were providing the archetype: Kaspar Hauser himself.

The infant who was to be the test subject was induced into Earth-time at Nuremburg in 1828, and permitted to *ingulf* the surrounding culture until 1833, when he was excised from the local timeline with a simple dagger wound. Yet the effects of the "jungle" on Kaspar Hauser were considered disappointing by House Arpexia, leading the noted strategist Entarodora – brought late into the proceedings, but already well-primed in the jungle child lore of the lesser species – to remark: 'what did you expect, the King of the Apes?'. It's true that within three weeks of his socialisation into human culture the subject could read tolerably well, count, write figures and play a harpsichord, but these were hardly accomplishments which would tax an hour of high-intensity neural training. While the experiment was accounted a failure, however, House Arpexia's data must surely have been useful during the later temporal vaccination projects of the Great Houses. And the effects of a single inexplicable element on the local human

culture was itself considerable, enabling Entarodora to formulate a policy of *disturbance by mystery* which would be later copied by such near-renegades as Robert Scarratt.

While Kaspar Hauser was singularly unaffected by his five years on Earth, he nevertheless succeeded in splitting his “native” country of Germany into hostile parties, and being seriously considered as a claimant for title of Crown Prince of Baden (from which, said his partisans, he’d been dispossessed by violence in childhood). Certain hyperaesthetic characteristics more common to House Arpexia than its cousin-Houses – night-vision, hallucinatory hysterics, and a highly developed sense of magnetism – were sufficient to turn this stranger into a pivot around which a society briefly twisted itself, in an effort to accommodate his seemingly impossible origins and accomplishments.

“JUSTINE’S STORY” [*Faction Paradox: Text*] Fully-documented stories of the Hauserkinder – of children who apparently appear in the middle of a community with no known origin, often believed to be born out of collapsed timelines – are hard to come by. However, an annexe to Foucault’s *Madness and Civilisation* does include a detailed Hauserkinder “archaeology”, originating in late-eighteenth century Somerset.

This tells of a girl who was adopted by a small farming village outside Taunton, and is based around a number of eyewitness accounts. Foucault calls the girl Justine, though he notes that none of the testimonies can agree on what her actual name was, nor her age. Her story follows the traditional submission narrative, but with an interesting emphasis of the transcendent. Justine frequently attempts to escape captivity by beguiling her adopted family with ‘heresy’ and ’the pagan spirit’. She has to be forced to attend church and must constantly be reminded of the scripture (she’s lucky, Foucault notes, not to have been born and burned a century earlier). She speaks in tongues and at one point is displayed as an *exotic* to a gullible businessman from Bristol. Foucault notes that the frequent sexual assaults, described by witnesses who seem pathologically absolved of any guilt, nevertheless keep her virginity intact. Her owners seem to have regarded her intact nature as an almost sacred trust. Who can imagine what punishments they believed a “real” rape would incur?

Justine’s account also demonstrates Faction Paradox’s interest in the Hauserkinder. The traditional Hauserkinder story ends with the mysterious disappearance of the subject, usually preceded by sightings of ‘strangers’, ‘black women’, ’bone men’, ‘hooded men’ or simply ‘death’ in the vicinity. For Justine, a release came when she was seen talking to ‘a fine lady of noble birth’ (according to a local schoolmaster) who nevertheless had ’the head of a skeleton’ (testimony of a notorious drunk). The next morning Justine was gone. Foucault comments, dryly and skeptically, on the suggestions that Justine had summoned this apparition by carving unreadable symbols into the flesh of her forearm. He suggests instead that she was trying to create a ‘Creole alphabet’ as a form of liberation from her wretched circumstances. And in a figurative sense he was possibly right.

The Faction's stake in the Hauserkinder is typically accounted for in two ways, *recruitment* or *assassination*. If the latter, then they were careful to remove the bodies and any trace of their presence afterwards. Brutal death isn't a recurrent theme in the folklore. But neither of these suggest the Faction's known operating methods. A third explanation is theological: the Faction sent agents to worship these living, breathing paradoxes (this was the conclusion reached by House Arpexia's study of the Hauserkinder, although Arpexia is notorious for taking things much too literally and has never really understood the Faction's approach). The theory seems plausible, yet reduces the Faction to the status of overawed hicks. A fourth explanation, rarely considered, is that the Hauserkinder represent a form of bio-terrorism against history itself and that elements of the Faction – always keen to test new weapons – have come to set them off.

KAIWAR [*Great Houses: Location (World)*] Site of one of the Thousand-Year Battles, and the location of the almost folkloric meeting between Devonire (would-be "reconciler" of the Great Houses) and the Immaculata Formosii (the alleged former agent of Faction Paradox who could, according to her own claims, supply Devonire with the totemic severed arm of the Faction's founder). Serious academicians are now in great doubt that the original Grandfather's arm exists, or that it would be of any value to Faction Paradox if it did, given that it ceased to have a ritualistic meaning once it had been removed. But by this point in his career Devonire was in no doubt that the arm would be a crucial signifier in the Houses' reconciliation with the former House Paradox.

The two parties agreed to meet in an abandoned urban region close to the time-fronts on Kaiwur, a site which, as it happens, Devonire had already investigated during the early stages of his search for the arm. Before the meeting Devonire implanted a recording device in his own perceptive matrix – a minor precaution, for a high-ranking diplomat – and as a result a full record of the encounter is available. (In fact "full" may be a loaded word, as the data comes directly from Devonire's *interpretation* of events, which means that although it's possible to gain second-hand experience of his less complex sensations it's also a distinctly slanted account.)

Considering that the rendezvous building was located on the outskirts of the Thousand-Year battlefields, it doesn't appear heavily damaged in the record. It can be seen listing towards the right, that side of its structure presumably being several hundred years older than the other since the battle. Formosii is seen waiting inside the building as Devonire arrives, dressed in a far more sombre fashion than one would expect from the nigh-legendary 'War Goddess' of the posthuman era. She's holding a package, loosely wrapped in cloth. Devonire asks to see the arm (not, it's got to be said, with great confidence) and Formosii edges out of the shadows towards the light from a rotting window-frame, to unwrap one end of the package and expose a withered hand. Devonire's exhilaration is almost tangible in the recording, though anyone experiencing the encounter second-hand still has to ask why he believed the arm to be so important at this stage. He asks the Immaculata to name her price. The Immaculata reaches into her belt and pulls out a knife.

The price asked is simple and, in the Faction's terms, logical: an arm for an arm. Devonire's for the Grandfather's.

Devonire refuses. His mental state suggests that he understands what's being asked of him, and this apparently horrifies him more than the thought of the act itself. Curiously he doesn't seem to wonder why Formosii should ask for an arm, if the woman had been indeed been attempting to betray the Faction. However, before Devonire can begin bargaining *something* begins to intrude on his perceptions. As the record was taken from Devonire's interpretation of events, rather than the raw sensory data, the impression the "viewer" gets is one of the shadows in the corner of the room beginning to stretch forward, as if something's moving into view even though Devonire's heightened, erratic state makes focusing impossible. Oddly his first reaction is to look out of the window rather than straight at the approaching object/s, perhaps to check whether some local-time distortion has changed the position of the sun. By the time he turns back to the centre of the room, the shadow has expanded as far as the Immaculata. She appears puzzled rather than horrified.

Devonire begins to panic, and here there's a slight discrepancy. The Immaculata is obviously asking for assistance, and insisting that she can't go back to the Faction, but there also seems to be some suggestion – at least in Devonire's perceptions – that she's saying something about her *new* allies. Yet despite intensive analysis, no such words seem to have actually been spoken. If there's a genuine glitch here, and if something's genuinely been removed from the record leaving only its after-impression in Devonire's senses, then it's not the only curious erasure in the life-story of the Immaculata Formosii (who's known to have formed brief alliances with various War-era powers before growing bored with them and moving on).

The conclusion of the encounter is, thankfully, more straightforward: Devonire snatches the arm and runs, never once focusing on the "blind spot" overshadowing Formosii. There the important section of the record ends.

Back on the Homeworld, Devonire immediately sent a dispatch to the Faction requesting a summit and mentioning that he was in possession of

the arm. He's known to have waited in his quarters for the response, contemplating the severed limb as it lay exposed on his desk, much to the alarm of his sub-academicians. This was the (short) era when the Houses had established the locations of various Faction powerbases but not yet acted against them, before the later crusades of the Second Wave, yet even though the transmission was precisely-directed the reply took hours to arrive: perhaps suggesting a sense of dramatic timing on the Faction's part:

'The arm is yours,' it said. 'We have no use for it.'

All further requests from Devonire received no response. It may partly have been this rejection by the Faction which triggered Devonire's eventual collapse. He had, after all, staked his reputation on the notion that the arm would be a (rather grotesque) symbol of reconciliation. However, it was most likely Devonire's later dwellings on the arm which had the greatest impact, not to mention the results of the full analysis performed on the *faux*-relic a few days later. But the end result of the meeting on Kaiwar was that Devonire became the first high-ranking academician to fall foul of what's now referred to as paradox anxiety.

KARACHI [*Lesser Species: Location/Event (Earth, C19)*] Coastal city of the lower Indus valley in the Scindh, now part of Pakistan. The establishment of a British military encampment outside the city in 1844 soon led to a flourishing sex trade, with several brothels being established, including – to the horror of the British authorities – one specialising in the supply of young boys and eunuchs to army officers. The establishment was largely a cover, however, for several native ritualists and tantrists using the organisation to provide subjects for their more dubious experiments in sexual and *shaktyanda* ceremony.

In 1845 or 1846 (the date is uncertain) it was reported to the British command, under Sir Charles Napier, that a small group of young army officers had taken to dabbling in the more dubious arts of the east and had begun practising with the "left-handed" rituals of the *tantra*, causing localised disruptions and attracting the attention of some unpleasant – though not particularly powerful – *daevas*. Captain Richard Francis Burton, although only 24 at the time, had the most experience of the officers present and was ordered to put a stop to the group's summonings. Such undercover work was easy for Burton, the group not suspecting him in the slightest: in fact his known interest in the occult served him in good stead, and he was invited to join them on a permanent basis.

It soon became apparent that the officers involved had gone a long way beyond mere dabbling, as during the ritual the young boy involved died and the summoning quickly spiralled out of control, unleashing at least one full-blood Mal'akh. The officers, half the occupants of the brothel and three individuals believed to be Cousins of Faction Paradox were killed trying to destroy or contain it. Burton escaped without a scratch.

The events of the night were quickly placed under a seal by Napier (Burton's Star Chamber contact as well as his superior in the army), but this didn't stop parts of the story being leaked at a later date and irreparably harming Burton's later career, although the details of precisely *what* was made public have never been clear as the papers have since been lost by the Indian authorities. Burton already had a questionable reputation thanks to his habit of immersing himself in foreign cultures, his desire to record his observations in minute detail and his natural

fascination with the links between the occult and eroticism, so *any* story, however vague, would have been enough to cause him trouble in later life. The whole truth would have finished his career in the Chamber, since among his superiors only Napier was aware of his recruitment by Faction Paradox and the role the Faction played in the night's events. As Napier's career was also on the line, it was in his interest to bury the story.

The Faction's reasons for keeping the incident under wraps are more questionable, though in recent years Burton has been quite open about the matter: the Faction didn't *kill* the Mal'akh, but captured it for study, transporting it to the Stacks of the Eleven-Day Empire. Burton's own notes, or at least those which have been made public by the Parliament, show that he was privy to many of the discoveries made during the subsequent research… although it's not known to what extent he participated in the experiments.

The incident did, however, fuel Burton's lifelong interest in the Mal'akh. His gift for languages, which included Arabic and Sanskrit, allowed him to translate volumes previously unknown to the west. His familiarity with the *Arabian Nights* fables hints at a deeper knowledge of the history which underlies the tales of the djinn, and he was the translator of the Indian cycle *Vikram and the Vampire*, which deals quite explicitly with the vampiric legacy of the Mal'akh in India. More significant still, though far less well-known, are his notes on the *Liber Sanguisugarum* or "Book of Leeches". Most historians are also aware of his involvement in the publication and translation of three of the East's most erotic texts – the *Ananga-Ranga*, the *Kama Sutra*, and the *Perfumed Garden* – all of which are known by ritual practitioners to hold several passages relating less to sexual contortions and more to the conjuring of demons (the *Ananga-Ranga*, in particular, containing certain sections which bear a startling resemblance to key passages of the *Key of Solomon* and similar texts of ceremonial magic).

“KILLERBOTS” *(AUTONOMIC)* [*House Military: Technology*]
Disparaging name for a nanotechnology-based weapon employed by the Great Houses during the early stages of the War, used mainly because old nanite stock happened to be available at the time (like all nanite weapons, the devices were considered a “vulgar” technology by most strategists and are now considered not only obsolete but vaguely embarrassing). The First and Second Waves of the House Military used simple nanite bio-sculpture to preserve and maintain their War-forms, and indeed to maintain their standard personalities. One way to think of the ground-level troops in those times – whether they were allied to the Houses or to the enemy – is as macroscopic collective colonies rather than armoured individuals colonies of battle germs, of time-measles. The autonomic killer was a weapon which attacked the colony, not the individual.

Imagine a person whose very cellular structure is augmented, being perpetually rebuilt, matched and checked against its external mechanical memory, eradicating cancer, repairing free-radical impact, stitching wounds and de-fevering brows. Now imagine that cellular structure being rebuilt *wrongly*.

In modem times, of course, the kind of protection which used to be offered by nano-augmentation is more efficiently supplied by temporal vaccination. It’s worth noting that the only forces which still have any affection for the old “killerbots” are certain soldiers of the Fourth Wave, those with a penchant for the wilfully-old-fashioned technologies known as burlesque devices.

***GARGIL* KRYMTORPOR [*Lesser Species*: *Participant (City of the Saved)*]** Inhabitant of the City of the Saved, leader (and representative in the Chamber of Residents) of the Ghetto of the Damned from AF 12 – 255 by the City's calendar. In her original lifetime (12,023,711 – 12,023,967 AD) as a member of one of the posthuman bloodlines, Krymtorpor was an interstellar pirate in the "decadent" age of posthuman culture, when pirates were reckless, rugged and wilfully excessive[8]. Marked for service by the Celestis in her infancy, she was allowed freedom of will until chance placed her in command of a group of well-dressed marauders attacking a freighter bound for Siloportem. The freighter happened to contain a shipment of anachronistic technology important to the Celestis' interests in the era, and Krymtorpor's Mark was immediately activated. The Celestis had her slaughter her own crew, in a blatant violation of the Pirates' Code, before boarding the freighter and from that point on acting as the shipment's bodyguard. She remained a servant of the Celestis in her native era until her death.

In the Celestis' terms Krymtorpor is currently an indentured slave of the Lords Twin Leopard, but the Celestis are well aware that on her second "death" Krymtorpor will be resurrected *again* in the City of the Saved. Since her identity as the future leader of the Ghetto of the Damned became known to them, the current version of Krymtorpor in Mictlan has spent most of her time being subjected to extreme brainwashing, in an effort to ensure that the resurrected version will in fact be a deep-cover agent for the Lords themselves. This seems, if anything, to have infuriated the resurrected Krymtorpor still further.

Krymtorpor's career in the City of the Saved has been one of angry politics, forever urging her fellow Residents and Councillors into open war against the Celestis; and of covert operations of her own against Celestis interests. In AF 255 she announced her retirement as leader of the Ghetto after two centuries: it's an open secret that she was forced out by her subordinate and successor, Nathaniel Wain. Rumours that Krymtorpor had been attempting to interfere with her own personal history, in an effort to avert her original Marking, may be exaggeration on Wain's part. Similarly, rumours that Wain – naturally another ex-Celestis slave – is a *successful* example of the brainwashing the Celestis are attempting to impose on

Krymtorpor are very likely propaganda. Still, Gargil Krymtorpor remains one of the City of the Saved's most vocal political campaigners.

LABYRINTHS [*Great Houses: Location*] Form of "vulgar" time-travel which seems to pre-date the timeships of the Great Houses. A labyrinth is essentially a network of open-ended space-time events, criss-crossing the continuum and linking one point with another regardless of the intervening space: however, those who've used labyrinths maintain that they definitely experienced the feeling of being *inside* some maze-like hyperstructure, suggesting that either (a) sentient beings insist on "creating" some kind of perceptual architecture during the journey in order to explain their sense of movement, or (b) a genuine labyrinthine structure genuinely exists, and has lain buried *beneath* the Spiral Politic since the prehistoric past. If the latter is true, then the labyrinth complex may well have been engineered (or at least made suitable for hominids) by the Eremites, the exiles and refugees who left the Homeworld of the Houses just as the first true timeships were being created.

Like many left-over sciences of the pre-timeship era, the labyrinth complex was dismissed as a lost relic until it was rediscovered in the years leading up to the War, when it was found that the posthuman procuress Mrs. Foyle was using it as the foundation of her time-active brothel. Though long-abandoned by the major powers, the labyrinths' potential was recognised immediately by every party with a stake in the conflict. The complex had been constructed without a space-time anchor, without a single vulnerable point which might be lost or destroyed in the fighting. It was thus an ideal supply route and secure store. The Houses, the Celestis and even the Homeworld's War-time enemy are known to have established lines of communication through the tunnels during this period, and there are even stories of impromptu truces among hated enemies who stumbled across each other in the dark. The virulent animosity which fuelled the early War was apparently forgotten in these cases, the combatants finding common cause in a fear of what else might be living in the maze.

In the end, the very accessibility of the labyrinths rendered them useless: there was nothing the Houses could put in that the enemy couldn't take out, and vice versa. Both sides routinely destroy entrances to the complex as soon as they're located. Faction Paradox continues to make use of the system, mainly for communicating with distant but vital Remote colonies, and it's believed that it intersects the Eleven Day Empire at least once. Mrs.

Foyle's brothel also uses this handy web of space-time connections, suggesting that her more daring recent venture – the assassination group known as the Remonstration Bureau – uses it to place its agents near their targets with the minimum of fuss.

***AMANDA LEGEND* LEFCOURT [*Lesser Species*: *Participant (City of the Saved)*]** Pureblood human being, a born native of the City of the Saved and the City's sometime Ambassador-in-Extraordinary to Mictlan. Born in AF 73 (by the City's calendar) of an Anglo-French father and an Inca mother, Lefcourt distinguished herself early as an artist in a variety of fields, notably as a miniature engraver and harpsichord soloist. A ten-year degree in Spiral history at the City's Clarendon University was followed by a move into politics, with Lefcourt becoming first the University's representative in the Chamber of Residents and later the first City-born City Councillor. Her political affiliations were moderate and unremarkable at first, but it's thought that at this stage she had already come under the influence of Grandfather Halfling, the reclusive founder of the City's part-human pressure group House Halfling. On the basis of her political reliability; she became the City's ambassador to the court of the Celestis.

The Celestis doubtless believed, after the scandal concerning their own Ambassador-in-Extraordinary to the City of the Saved, that Lefcourt would be recalled to the City: but she stayed on, rather to the chagrin of the Celestis, whose complicated protocols meant that they were unable to either expel her or provide her with a Mark of Indenture. The Lords of Mictlan still believe that Lefcourt was acting as a spy at this time, either for the City Council or (in light of later developments) for House Halfling. After she offered sanctuary to the murderer of the Celestis Lord Foaming Sky, however, her position became untenable and she hurriedly returned to the City with the asylum-seeker in AF 267. Her prompt response suggests that she was directly briefed by whichever faction was responsible for Foaming Sky's death.

On her return, Lefcourt relocated to Godsdice District, the radical enclave which houses the physical domain of House Halfling. Swiftly re-elected to the Chamber of Residents, She became a vocal proponent of the rights of the City's part-human minorities, arguing passionately against the City's traditional human-isolationist stance. Too respectable politically to discount, her spokesmanship has been a valuable asset to House Halfling during the last century of City life. She represents a more dynamic generation of politicians in the City, though she remains far more measured in her methods than pro-universe interventionists like the Gargil

Krymtorpor. Lefcourt herself summed up her beliefs in a recent speech to the City Council:

‘The City is a vital, fecund society, and naturally so: three hundred years after Resurrection Day we are still thrilling from the shock of finding ourselves here. Here all human cultures collide and intersect, creating inspiration and complexity. Yet this will pass. The day will come – unthinkable millions of years from now; but it will come – when every single person in the City knows every tiny fact about every single other.

What will we have to look forward to then? An eternity as stagnant and unchanging as that of The Great Houses. The human soul is vast, but it is finite. One day, we will have to look to the souls of others. How will it be then if we look and find no image of ourselves reflected?’

[[▲ AMANDA LEGEND LEFCOURT]]

LESSER SPECIES [*Major Power*] Term originally used by the Great Houses to describe any species other than their own. However, in recent years so many other cultures have become time-active – often as a result of War fallout – that some of the Newblood Houses are beginning to redefine the phrase, with only non-time-active cultures being regarded as "lesser". And the distinction's an important one, because according to the Protocols of the Houses *all* stable forms of time-travel have a biological element and demand the rewriting of the traveller's biodata. So when a species becomes time-active, it isn't simply a technological step: it effectively requires the species to mutate into *another* species, to alter itself on the most basic genetic and memetic levels.

Although it's widely accepted that the Great Houses created the framework of known history, it's important to stress that this doesn't mean they planned out every moment of every lifetime on every world (if they had, runs the argument, then they wouldn't now be at War and wouldn't even have created the enemy… unless, of course, they were driven by some kind of self-punishing urge). It's perhaps truer to say that the Houses simply set the operating parameters of history, according to their own vested interests at the time. Similarly, stories of god-like beings on many inhabited worlds shouldn't be taken as evidence that the Houses visited those worlds, but rather can be seen as deep-rooted acknowledgements, even by primitive cultures, that in a universe like *this* one such apparently majestic beings would inevitably have pulled themselves up out of the raw matter of biology at some point. This may also explain stories in certain cultures which seem to describe the prehistoric war between the Houses and the Yssgaroth.

[[▲ LESSER SPECIES.]]

Therefore, despite being viewed as “gods” or at least “Immortals” by many pre-time-aware cultures the Great Houses are nowhere near as all-knowing as they may like the universe to believe. Even if they influenced the environment in which the younger cultures evolved; their understanding of many species is patchy, at best; they often feel compelled to intervene and stop these young upstarts gaining high-order time technology, and perhaps most importantly, thanks to some of the lesser species there are areas of space-time where the Great Houses simply *can’t* go. In the War Era this unknown patch of history, this *tempus incognita*, is a liability as it could provide enemy forces with all sorts of bolt-holes and staging-posts.

As the unexplored regions largely exist in the posthuman eras, the posthumans have increasingly become convinced of their own importance, especially as their “present” has now become intertwined with the “present” of the Homeworld itself. Certain individuals among these groups, including the former posthuman 'War Goddess’ the Immaculata Formosii, have even made alliances with the enemy and have come think of themselves as full-time War participants.

Often the non-combatant lesser species will witness battles between the Great Houses and their opponents, and attempt to explain them away. While many of these explanations aren’t worthy of exploration – being overly simplistic, or highly reliant on the observer’s culture and surroundings – a number bear further scrutiny. Some cultures believe that the War isn’t being fought by cultures or species but by portions of the universe themselves. The possibility is constantly being raised that the War is a deliberate attempt to obliterate both sides: that warfare fought at such a fundamental level will not result in simple death for the combatants, but rather deification. The temporal detonation caused by a kamikaze time-ship pilot won’t rip him or her apart as much as burn that pilot into the fabric of the Spiral Politic.

This current volume is, for obvious reasons, largely concerned with the effects of the War on human development and the history of Earth. However, it should be pointed out that despite the claims of some posthuman groups to be “special” among the lesser species, Earth probably isn’t the most tactically significant world in the Spiral Politic. It is true that the largely-unexplored posthuman period seems of some importance, but aside from its name – and, perhaps, the fact that occupied Earth is a convenient historical stepping-stone between the Homeworld’s territories and the posthuman worlds – this shouldn’t be seen as proof of humanity’s greatness. The posthuman species-group only came into being through billennia of cross-breeding between human and nonhuman technologies, so it’s entirely feasible that similar cultures might have been created even without human genetic participation.

Even so, several posthuman sects on the brink of becoming time-active seem proud of their status as “lesser” beings. The argument is that to become part of a “greater” species, one has to make one’s own biodata

utterly mutable, to open up one's biology to the processes of time-travel. But as a result the traveller will have no definite place in space and time, no destiny and no fixed timeline. Ultimately, say the posthumans, a species which becomes like the Great Houses erases the only *genuine* identity it'll ever have. Those who follow this doctrine regard the agents of the Houses as both damned and insubstantial, as friend-of-a-friend stories who happen to be wearing badly-fitting bodies.

Although there's some logic to this argument, it perhaps places too much importance on ancient superstitious concepts like "destiny" and "true self". And yet perhaps that's only to be expected. The Great Houses have the technology to predict a subject's future by reading his or her biodata, but the Protocols state it's literally impossible for an individual to read his or her *own* future: the Protocols of Observation dictate that this will cause the observation to collapse in on itself and render the future knowledge worthless. It's possible that humanity has always had some built-in understanding of this principle, as it's reminiscent of certain pre-time-aware myths in which prophets and soothsayers are capable of predicting anybody's future except their own.

Hardly surprising, then, that "lesser" posthumans should see the Houses' lack of destiny as proof of the Houses' inferiority.

[[▲The Immaculata Formosa, before her alliance with the enemy.]]

LETHEAN CAMPAIGN [*Great Houses: Location/Event (Early War Era)*] Major campaign of the Early War Era, notably partly for its colourful cast of characters (it saw the last ever use of casts in a military operation, not to mention the number of exotic mercenaries drafted in by all sides) and partly for the massive slaughter carried out by the Homeworld's babels.

Ever since the atrocity at House Catherion the babels had been considered an unstable, unacceptable proposition: but that was in the Pre-War Era. Now, with the enemy bearing down on all fronts, the babels were a necessary evil as long as their raging violence could be controlled or, at the very least, directed elsewhere. House renegades and errant interventionists were wooed back to the Homeworld with promises of pardons, political power and even brand new regenerative facilities: on arrival, they were betrayed, overpowered and lobotomised by military psychosurgeons (generally hailing from House Mirraflex) who then fitted them with neural links to the surviving babels. Now under the relative restraint of the Homeworld's puppets, the babel berserkers could be released against the enemy. It was the last crusade of the Second Wave, a period which more rational Houses like Dvora would soon come to regard as an age of brutal excess.

For a year the babels fought a fierce offensive on the frontline of the Lethean Campaign. Unable to operate on all the fronts, they were supremely successful wherever they were deployed. One observer, an auxiliary fighting for the Homeworld, wrote:

'The babels are pure contradiction. They have no passion for war. They don't see an enemy: they see meat. Yet unleashed, they become nothing but passion, fury unchecked by mercy or satisfaction. I have seen babels delay an offensive in order to abuse or mutilate a prisoner. They do not like to kill. They take care and pleasure in keeping their victims alive as long as they can. I spoke to one today. Her voice was so sweet and she posed herself with such delicacy. One can almost long to be the enemy and suffer their affections.'

The babels couldn't have turned the War on their own, but they gave the Homeworld a powerful advantage at a time when the Houses were still

struggling to come to terms with “vulgar” combat. Their destruction was a severe blow to the morale of the Houses and remains a great mystery of the War Era. An unknown party boarded the timeship where the puppet operators were hidden, outwitting the security systems as well as the guards before killing the three former renegades quietly and without undue violence. Briefly vulnerable, the babels were slaughtered by wave after wave of enemy suicide attacks. It’s been suggested that the assassin was working for the enemy or even for a subversive group like Faction Paradox, but there are persistent rumours that he or she was another renegade, maybe an associate or rival of the trio, who only wished to end their suffering.

The babels are now thought to be extinct, and certainly no more are held at the dilapidated House of the Order of the Weal, where they were believed to have been kept after their creation and primed for their first, and only, campaign.

LEVIATHANS [*Intercreational*] One of a family of beings known as intercreationals, a form of immense animal life known to inhabit the spaces between bubble-universes (e.g. the spaces between this universe and its closest neighbours): a typical Leviathan is estimated to be around 150,000,000,000,000,000 light-years in length. In the Pre-War Era, the Leviathans were considered to be vast-but-unintelligent hyper-objects, and any speculation there had been on the subject amounted to horror stories of one blundering against an inhabited universe, but the horror was distanced in un-space and un-time.

The biology of these creatures remained a mystery until an expeditionary cohort of the Seventh Wave was cut off from Homeworld contact close to the "frontier in time" at the posterior end of recordable history. Supply problems had left the troops with no more than an outmoded 89-form timeship between themselves and the unknown regions, the *tempus incognita*. Their chance of return seemed minimal, and Quintessence Officer Hierarchio is recorded as having suggested the creation of a settlement on one of the worlds which were still accessible so far into the future.

In seeking a home, the cohort arrived in the vicinity of the Anvil Stars, a region often thought to have been artificially aged as a result of the War. It's long been established that at a certain point in its history any given universe will be capable of "spawning" – not in any organic or *living* sense, but nonetheless budding new, younger proto-universes from their mass – and in the Anvil Stars region the cohort was able to observe first-hand the creation of such a budded universe.

In doing so they observed that during the calfing process, when the universe-seeds are compressed in areas as small as the outer electron shell of a hydrogen atom, mechanisms existed to *weed* the seeds and select bud-universes with certain, specific characteristics.

Accordingly, the troops were able to isolate a number of the "gardener" devices in a null-time envelope for later study.

It was initially assumed that the characteristics favoured by the "gardeners" were those either of the universe *before* the current universe

(in which case the gardeners were devices which had outlived their creators, or possibly even contained them, and had passed through the current universe unharmed to commence sculpting the next) or that they were devices of the future crafted by the Great Houses' descendents/supplanters (to ensure that successor universes would be ready for their occupancy). However, tests carried out after the eventual return of the cohort showed that the "gardeners" were converting the universe-seeds into something else.

They were turning baby universes into proto-Leviathans. Tweaking the intra-nuclear force here, massaging down the universal gravity meta-constants there, carrying out cosmetric engineering on a previously unimaginable scale. The practical purpose of an entity (let alone vast numbers of entities) large enough to dwarf the entire Spiral Politic is inconceivable. In Hierarchio's words; 'To imagine that our future selves have done this is as little comfort as to imagine that it was done by others. If we did this, then what did we become?'

Information about this discovery was at once suppressed, but it's known that a datacoil containing the information was taken by agents of the Celestis. If the Celestis have dreams, in their realm of Mictlan on the outer skin of the known universe, then maybe they'll be able to see the Leviathans bearing down on them in waves which the Houses' soldiery will never be able to match.

LIBER SANGUISUGARUM [*Faction Paradox: Text*] The erroneously translated "Book of Blood" (the Latin actually translates as "The Book of Leeches", or, more figuratively, the book of parasites). Written in many hands over a seven hundred year period, the book is composed of various ancient sources such as the Book of Enoch plus works on related subjects from the early twelfth century onwards. The book was commissioned (and some believe partly written) by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Cistercian Order and sponsor of one of the military-religious societies dedicated to eradicating the Mal'akh of the Middle East.

Among the diverse documents copied into the body of the text, scholars have translated some of the earliest versions of the Book of Enoch and the Book of Noah, with their account of the fall of the *Nephilim* and the beings' crimes and punishments; as well as what appears to be an account in the words of King Solomon himself regarding his containment of a large number of these beings, an account thought to relate to legends of King Solomon's power over the djinn. Sir Richard Francis Burton, the last known custodian of the book, once claimed that all the knowledge ever needed to combat the Mal'akh was contained within its pages if one only had the wit to look in the right places.

Various hands have added to the book over the centuries, as it's been passed down from one generation of the Grand Families to another. A notable property of the book is that it's never been rebound, despite being expanded considerably since it was created. Those who've possessed the volume through the years have claimed that it always has sufficient blank pages for the work to be continued, leading to suggestions that it is in fact an artefact originating with the Great Houses, or at least created by those with knowledge of their technologies. This may be further evidence that some form of pact was made between the Great Houses of the Homeworld and the Grand Families in Europe, though there's still no record of what the terms might have been.

The book came into the possession of Captain Burton some time after 1861, and it's suspected that his researches into the Mal'akh significantly expanded upon the contents of the work. But since Burton took the book with him upon his defection to the Eleven-Day Empire, any further

analysis of the artefact must come from Faction Paradox, and as with most of Burton's work for the Faction his own theories on the subject have been sealed by his superiors… leading to speculation in certain quarters that his complete conclusions contain information which may prove detrimental to the Faction's position.

***HOUSE* LINEACRUX [*Great Houses: Ruling House*]** Apparently the least active of the Oldblood Houses, 'old men drifting into a buttery-yellow senility, their heads nodding through this measure and then that' as one House Tracolix commentator has put it: noting the yellow robes of the House, and the characteristically aged forms of its rulers, sadly without noticing that in fact their nodding, their mumbling, and even their occasional deafness is often quite carefully orchestrated. Nowhere on the Homeworld is there a House so ready to work its will by planting the correct whisper in the relevant ear, by making murmured suggestions so subtle that after the fact nobody even remembers who spoke. While House Dvora moves with an efficient, unstoppable openness, the mandarins of Lineacrux are so softly-spoken, so serene, so *elderly*, that in this brutal new War age even those who should know better rarely remember how ruthless these 'senile old men' might possibly be.

Before the War, the Great Houses had almost forgotten the symbolic importance of the *old*. Now as younger Houses jostle for attention in the Hall of Addresses, and "fashionable" War-Era lingo is increasingly slipping its way into the debates of the War Councils, the steadfast and pure antiquity of Lineacrux must be seen as a deliberate razor-edged insertion of their own iconic authority into the politics of the upstart young Houses. They, their manners proclaim, are the Wise Men; and theirs is the experience of time.

When a group of Newblood Houses gathers, there will be one old man, perhaps slouching at the back in a tattered yellow gown which on closer inspection is still just recognisable as the official regalia of one of the more ancient Presidencies. While never the leading voice, he will still be consulted. On points of Pre-War fact, and on matters involving jurisprudence and constitutional precedent, he may be the only person with any knowledge whatsoever (and if this is the case, then who's to verify that his pronouncements are in fact historical?). Lineacrux's members are undoubtedly dedicated to the Homeworld's interests, provided that the caveat "as they conceive those interests to be" is added. In recent times it was House Lineacrux which quietly arranged the creation of the Nine Homeworlds, although the House has been quite happy to let other, more minor, bloodlines take the credit for this feat.

***PROTOCOLS OF* LINEARITY [*Great Houses: Culture*]** Of all the Protocols which define the limits of the Great Houses, the most widely-discussed are the Protocols of Linearity. Though the Houses have almost complete freedom of movement in the Spiral Politic, the one major exception is the Homeworld itself. Not only is it impossible/illegal to travel into the Houses' own past, but it's built into the very nature of the Homeworld's time-technology that whenever Homeworld-time meets outside-time, the two should become analogous. So if an agent of one of the Houses leaves the Homeworld for, say, five years then when he returns home he'll find that five years have passed there as well… even though the *pure* theory of time states that he should be able to return moments after he left. In effect what this Protocol suggests is that whenever an agent enters an area of time outside the Homeworld, the area becomes in some way "linked" to the Homeworld. Even though the two worlds may be aeons apart, events on those worlds appear to take place simultaneously.

Quite obviously, if either side in the War could entirely ignore the Protocols then it would provide a major strategic advantage. For example, just prior to the War the ruling Houses dispatched a number of agents to hunt down the 102-form timeship known as Compassion, as by then it was already clear to both the ruling Houses and the War King that the 102-form would be a decisive factor in the coming conflict. As only a finite number of agents were available, this mission was ultimately a failure: but if Linearity hadn't been obeyed, then the Houses would only have needed *one* agent and the mission might have been much more successful. The agent would have had an infinite amount of time left before the start of the War, and could comfortably have spent entire millennia searching every single site where the Compassion unit might have been found.

Therefore, non-Linearity would supply both sides with practically infinite biodata resources, in the same way that both sides already have practically infinite material resources. And this in itself has made many theorists wonder whether the Great Houses *can* revoke any of the unwritten Protocols; whether they're kept in place by some form of deep-rooted agreement with the enemy; or whether both sides simply worry about the consequences of breaking them. Even Faction Paradox seems bound by Linearity, so no doubt the Faction's elders would claim that the *loa* who

look after such things are too powerful to get on one's side no matter how many offerings one makes to them.

LOA [*Faction Paradox: Legendary Participants*] According to the Great Houses, time may not be simple but it's at least logical. Time can best be understood in equations, in models: the workings of history are high-order mathematical structures, certainly complex but (given a large enough computer, say, one capable of decrypting entire universes) still explicable as nothing more than numbers.

Faction Paradox, on the other hand, is an organisation obsessed with alternative-time systems. To the Faction, the processes of time aren't formulae or theoretical concepts. The processes of time are *entities*. Time is occupied, even guarded, by *loa* which have no tangible presence in the universe but which can protect, beguile, curse and possess anybody who tries to cross their boundaries. And however much the other Houses might detest this suggestion, the Faction's view does have a certain logic to it. Even if the Houses claim that the processes of time are mere phenomena, those phenomena are so complex that there's no reason they *shouldn't* have a will of their own, taking on a form of sentience just as any complex system might do. There are parts of the Spiral Politic where the structure of history is made up of trillions upon trillions of pieces of information, vastly more than the typical human brain. Indeed, if history could be viewed from the correct angle, how does anybody know that there wouldn't appear to be "organisms" encoded in its mass? If that's even remotely true, and history evolves, then it'd certainly explain how the Houses can now be at War even though they specifically designed history to make War impossible.

The word *loa* has its origins among the voodoo-cultures of post-eighteenth century Earth, and although in its human form it literally means "spirit" this shouldn't be taken too literally. A *loa* isn't a ghost, as such, nor is it a god. It's a presence which walks on a plane alongside humankind rather than above it, which can be invoked, called upon or even invited to occupy the body of the summoner. Voodoo practitioners use the *loa* almost as spiritual tools, summoning the higher presences to "ride" them and thereby invest them with that *loa's* own abilities. Some of them are ancestral (and tend to have familial names, suggestive of the Grandfather of House Paradox) while some of them are linked to a specific place, item or even historical event.

And for the Faction, the *loa* work in much the same way. Though no catalogue of these supposed entities has ever been made, it's suggested that every kind of temporal phenomenon has its own corresponding *loa*. In part the Faction's rituals are designed to communicate with them, to *prime* them, although it's unclear how literally the Faction's agents take this binding process. Without doubt, elder members such as Godfather Morlock have been known to invent *loa* out of thin air whenever necessary… but then, the Godfathers are duty-bound to research alter-time, so perhaps there's little difference between them devising a new loa and a less exotic scientist creating a new chemical formula. The Eleven-Day Empire is known to be protected by the loa, at least according to the Faction itself. The region is sealed off from the rest of time by unique alter-mapping equations, and it's therefore not surprising that the Faction would see its stronghold as being protected by its own private, invisible bodyguard. Evidently eighteenth century London has as many "spirits" as the eighteenth century Caribbean.

Those Faction agents who've studied the culture of the lesser species have long since realised that it's not just time which has its own *loa*. A *loa* is a mythic, symbolic entity, with an existence beyond the material world, capable of directing the individual even though he or she has no physical connection to it: therefore, in media-dependent cultures every hero, film star, pop idol and minor celebrity is a kind of *loa*. It was on this principle that the Faction founded the first Remote colonies.

***HOUSE* LOLITA [*Great Houses: House*]** Newblood House, one of the smaller and more obscure bloodlines among the Great Houses (indeed, House Lolita doesn't appear to have existed at all before the outbreak of the War). To say that Lolita is a small House would be something of an understatement, as according to the official record it currently has just one member, and its only apparent significance is that it seems to have entered into some kind of pact with the much larger House Tracolix. This isn't an unusual arrangement: many Newblood Houses are springing up in the wake of the War, most of them created purely as experiments in reproductive technology. These Houses are often obsessed with biodiversity and with the cultures of the lesser species, which would certainly explain Lolita's somewhat unusual choice of name.

It's feasible that the famously ambitious House Tracolix might hope to gain some kind of bio-military advantage from this experimental House, which would certainly increase Tracolix's standing among the six ruling bloodlines. Whatever the truth, with only one member it seems unlikely that House Lolita will be making a great impact on Homeworld politics in the immediate future.

LONDON *(EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)* [*Faction Paradox: Location (Eleven-Day Empire)*] The Faction Paradox's Eleven-Day Empire is commonly assumed to be modelled on eighteenth century London, but this isn't entirely accurate. It should be remembered that in the eighteenth century, London was still three distinct cities: the City, Westminster and Southwark. Faction Paradox is based in Westminster, the political capital of Britain, which gives it authority over the British Empire (an Empire still in its infancy in 1752, but already on the verge of losing colonies in the New World). Yet, ironically, this doesn't give the Faction jurisdiction over the City of London right on its own doorstep, the area of the Eleven-Day Empire which includes Tower Hill and is the seat of the Unkindnesses.

It's hard to realise how different London was at this time to the modern idea of the city. Opposite Parliament were open fields and Lambeth Palace; Oxford Street was a dirt road; Trafalgar Square had yet to be built (naturally). The Eleven-Day Empire's London is a tangle of different eras and anachronisms, the Faction having built a London which exists in symbols. It's a city of fictions in which Trafalgar Square has a statue of the Grandfather on top of the column that should be Nelson's, and Landseer's four great lions have become English sphinxes, each one wearing the bone-mask of a different animal. At Vauxhall, on the opposite bank of the Thames, new stealth-weapons are built in the twentieth century MI6 building and tested in the eighteenth century pleasure-gardens. Below the city lies a complete network of tunnels, the ghost stations on the London Underground which make up the Stacks, the area directly beneath the Natural History-Museum occupied by the bio-research workshops of Godfather Morlock. And everywhere the city's lit by the same boiling red sky, as if there's a fire just beyond the horizon, possibly a memory of 1666 or possibly a vision of the apocalyptic riots of 1780.

The Eleven-Day Empire's London is a chaotic mishmash, then, a version of a city where the sites mostly seem to have been chosen for their usefulness in Faction ritual.

***THE* LORDS CELESTIAL [*Celestis*: *Group (War Era)*]** Sundered from their roots in Homeworld society, it's hardly surprising that the social groups of the Celestis have shattered again, and again, and again. Whereas the ruling Houses of the Homeworld can be counted on the fingers of a single hand (at least, assuming that the hand in question has been augmented by forced-regen), the Celestis claim 'ninety-nine Houses', a tally of a society which clearly no longer exists as a workable system. The Celestis have reached such a grandiose total by *denying* society, by becoming solitary Lords – the term is used irrespective of gender – each with a few retainers, a retinue of assassins, a surrounding clique of like-minded yet constantly-shifting allies, but nonetheless every Lord is ultimately a single entity and a unique node of being. The evolving and overblown names adopted by the Lords signifies that this process is at least acknowledged, if vaingloriously: Smoked Mirror, Twin Leopard, Yellow King, and so on.

They're also the most deeply unpleasant thought-forms you could ever hope to meet, and I should know, having been a prisoner in Mictlan for… actually, I don't know how long. Even for a ***Shift*** ***l****ike myself, Mictlan's about as non-linear a place as you could ever hope to avoid.*

But again, I'm getting away from the main point of this story: me. After the Celestis put me firmly under their control, they had to work out what to do with me. The faction which had argued for my death before I came under exclusive contract pointed out that I could never be trusted with field work, nor should I be allowed to associate with the servant class. I was more trouble than I was worth, frankly. Still, the Celestis are loath to waste anything, so the more moderate members came up with an alternate use for me.

That's how the Celestis Zoo got started. I was imprisoned in a memetic cage, and put on display for the amusement of the Lords Celestial. It had been decades since a concept not originating with the Celestis or their servants had been even contemplated in Mictlan, so you can imagine that they'd need something to gawp at every now and then. And I was new. I wasn't fully under control. So the Celestis and their twisted offspring would stop by every so often, squinting at me through the imaginary bars, thinking about

what I might do if I were to ever break free of the cage. If I'd had the strength, I would have laughed. I was living in a thought-space barely big enough to let me turn round, in perpetual humiliation. If they'd let me have a voice I would've begged for death. Eventually I stopped being an individual and faded into the background, which I can tell you is a horrible fate for a conceptual entity. By this time the Zoo had expanded, and the Celestis were exhibiting other ideas from outside their domain. My neighbours were Compassion and Hedonism.

It was hell. And keep in mind, Mictlan was already as close to hell as made no difference, but being a shadow of a shadow of a member of an almost-forgotten freakshow in hell is a damn sight worse than just being in hell. I was desperate for some kind of release, death particularly.

The Zoo had expanded so much that the Celestis assigned one of their servants the job of maintaining it. This servant would eventually become my saviour, as it happens. It was attending – cleaning isn't the right word for it, things don't get dirty from neglect in Mictlan, they just get vague – it was attending the facility when it looked at me. They usually didn't do that. The servants in Mictlan were stripped down, worn away. Hope was anathema to them, it was a concept the Lords kept in the locked part of the menagerie, and the servants only ever did anything if they were obliged to do it. They didn't even interact with one another. Most of them balked at the concept of any sense of self.

But this one looked at me. And thought about me.

You have to understand what being thought about is to a conceptual entity. For me, that one thought was like a sip of water after a century of nothing but dust. True, the Celestis had thought about me, but there's not a lot of room for manoeuvre in a thought-system with no imagination. This servant (and I never found out what its name was, if it even had one) thought about me as I was. As I could have been. And most importantly, about what I might become.

Re-energised. At last. With the barest fraction of my old power available to me, I could jump into the servant's mindset (horrible place, by the way) and plant the idea that it should mention me to any other servants it might encounter. It wasn't easy, but in the end all I had to do was make myself

interesting enough. It wasn't long before I found myself the focus of a huge underground fascination from the servants, the first sub-culture Mictlan had ever known. Oh, I'm so proud.

When the Celestis themselves found out about this, they had no idea what to do. Their initial impulse was to get rid of me. You can't kill an idea that easily, though. You can kill secrets, but only by getting rid of the people who share them. To kill me off they would have had to cull their entire servant staff, which is something that none of them were eager to do. So I became a fleeting kind of thing, passed second-hand from servant to servant and never staying in one belief-system for too long. And yes, for a while, my energy waned again. Until I found my second saviour.

That was the Memeovore.

Look it up.

***THE* MALACHITE ROOM [*Faction Paradox: Location (Thirteen-Day Republic)*]** A room within the Winter Palace of the rogue Faction Paradox colony the Thirteen-Day Republic, and the power centre for the Republic's founder Anastasia. In essence it was the Republic's equivalent of the Eleven-Day Empire's Parliament.

In the "real" Winter Palace, the Malachite Room was initially a private retiring room for the Romanovs, later becoming the site of the First Provisional Soviet before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917: so Anastasia naturally made its "shadow" counterpart the centre of the Thirteen-Day Republic. As well as the preexisting malachite pillars, fireplaces and decorative motifs, she had the walls coated in thin sheets of the mineral and installed a long banqueting table carved from a single malachite slab, all buffed to a shine. The material was mined in the Siberian wastes, and it's likely that the room cost hundreds of lives. This extravagance can be explained by the fact that malachite was traditionally said to ward off the Evil Eye and witchcraft: Anastasia was building herself a bunker where she could safely sit out any fallout from the War. Though the Republic had been built on the principle of equality for all, it soon became clear that this was *Anastasia's* room, and that even former confidantes like Cousin-Once-Removed Nadim could be shut out.

The walls and table were so polished that every time someone moved in the room they could glimpse dark, distracting reflections moving around them on all sides. Towards the end of the Republic, Anastasia spent hours tracing patterns in the green and talking to these reflections. Malachite is a *soft* gemstone and it's said that after the final duel of the battle of Valentine's Day the footprints of Anastasia and Cousin Octavia could be seen pressed into the table-top, including a crack across its surface where the founder of the Republic finally fell to her knees.

MAL'AKH [Lesser Species: Participants (Earth)]

'And it came to pass, when men began to multiply over the face of the Earth and daughters were born unto them, that the Sons of God [angels] saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose… there were giants in the Earth in those days: and also after that, when the Sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bore children to them…'
– The Book of Genesis, Ch. 6.

The root of the Hebrew word usually translated as "angel", the Mal'akh sprang from the race called *anakim* (or "watchers", in Greek "Grigori") mentioned in the Book of Enoch, the Book of Noah and other Biblical apocrypha. Rebelling against the non-interventionist policies of their race, these fallen *anakim* are said to have bred with lesser species, producing monstrous offspring who drank the blood of the living. Some later commentators have suggested that this legend is a corrupted account of the Great Houses' war against the Yssgaroth, and of the flight from the Homeworld of those children of the House tainted by Yssgaroth biomass. The *Liber Sanguisugarum* gives the name Mal'akh to the whole race of Yssgaroth offspring which have made Earth their home.

The *Liber Sanguisugarum* recognises two distinct bloodlines: the *rephaim*, who can pass for human, and the *nephilim*, the (metaphorical) "giants in the Earth" briefly mentioned in Genesis. The Mal'akh themselves are often described as inhumanly beautiful: to the Arabian and Middle Eastern peoples among whom they've lived, they're the *spirits of the air* and masters of storms. Some scholars believe their existence forms the basis for the legends of the djinn, and indeed, certain passages in the book support this theory.

The Mal'akh, even the most human of them, are driven to feed upon the blood and flesh of the living. For this reason alone they aroused the lasting fear of humanity, which has always reacted violently to any species (though usually animals) who are either in competition for the same food sources or opportunistic feeders on the human dead. As a result the Mal'akh are at once very real and an important figment of humanity's collective subconscious, capable of redefining themselves to suit their

circumstances and spreading with man across his planet as he explored it. Several speculative passages in the *Liber Sanguisugarum* detail the methods by which these creatures can be killed, one of which explodes the popular myth that "the undead" can be destroyed simply by inserting a stake or properly-prepared weapon into the heart. In fact, any organic object can be simply assimilated into a Mal'akh's body and rendered harmless. The notion that running water is an anathema to them derives from the fact that early travellers who encountered members of the race saw them primarily as a desert-dwelling people, who nonetheless seemed to require no water in order to survive. Given that water was a rare and precious commodity in these regions, it's easy to see how it would be attributed with supernatural properties and take on a totemic significance as the bane of desert-devils.

It's commonly held that the ceremonial armour of Faction Paradox is made from the bones of individuals (perhaps even members of the Great Houses) tainted by the biomass of the Yssgaroth, and the general assumption is that these must therefore be the skeletons of the Mal'akh. Yet despite the obvious parallels between the War in Heaven described by the Book of Enoch and the ancient Great House/Yssgaroth war, no trace in any human myth exists of hybrid-creatures which match the description of the bat-like monsters whose remains are so prized by the Faction. The *nephilim*, for example, are described as "giants" or "monstrous" but cranial deformities are never mentioned. In fact the *nephilim* are said to be extraordinarily beautiful in form, especially in Islamic mythology.

However there is one disputed passage which may hold a clue to the link between the Mal'akh and the armour. In the *Liber Sanguisugarum*, a very late entry in the handwriting of Richard Francis Burton translates an obscure Sanskrit passage in his discussion of the degenerate Mal'akh known as grotesques, which reads: *They hold whatever form suits their purpose best, but should they wish to seem fair to our eyes, they must feed upon the blood of man. Should they of necessity feed upon each other, then their curse is laid bare for all to see…'*

In all the traditions in which they appear, the Mal'akh are noted as masters of illusion, inhabiting folkloric otherworlds where time runs differently to time in the known world. Those who encounter them and

survive often tell of losing years of their lives, and mythology abounds with tales of those who dwell in the otherworld only to turn to dust upon returning to their own realms. Indeed, it was quite probably this Mal'akh-time which was briefly explored during the Maltese Incident of 1809. Many have seen this as proof that the Mal'akh are connected in some way to the Great Houses, lending weight to the story that the Faction's armour is created from the bones of those Great House agents who were infected by Yssgaroth biomass in a timeline where the Homeworld lost the ancient Yssgaroth war. Yet the Faction's foremost expert on such matters, Father Abdullah, disputes this. His claim is that the Houses' paranoid reaction to the Faction's armour has nothing to do with a fear of the implied paradox it supposedly represents, but is instead to do with the fact that they fear the truth even more.

Father Abdullah's suggestion is that the Yssgaroth/Great House hybrids weren't a result of a war lost, but an inevitable result of a war fought: that the cross-breeding between these species wasn't dependent upon the Homeworld being overrun, but that contamination of the Great Houses' biomass took place *during* the War, and it's this taint which the Homeworld refuses to acknowledge. This much isn't new, as many time-aware cultures have speculated that some (though not many) members of the Houses may have suffered some form of degeneration during the Yssgaroth conflict. But Abdullah goes on to point out that there are marked similarities between the fast-regeneration abilities of the Houses and the fast-regeneration abilities of the Mal'akh, suggesting that the ancient Houses may have *deliberately* infected themselves with a controlled dose of Yssgaroth matter in order to give themselves a biological advantage. If this is the case, then the creatures which supplied the Faction's skeletal armour may not have been victims of the Yssgaroth but failed experiments of the Homeworld itself… or even future versions of the Houses' agents, their biodata finally overcome by the Yssgaroth taint[9].

Neither the Great Houses nor the Faction favour this interpretation. They prefer to regard the Mal'akh as a local aberration, perhaps a kind of "oxbow lake" in the river of time. As a result the full Mal'akh conclusions have never been revealed to the Cousins of Faction Paradox. [For picture, see under Napoleonic Era.]

***THE* MALTESE INCIDENT *(1809)* [*Lesser Species: Event (Earth, C19)*]**
The records of the quasi mystical Star Chamber are few and far between at the best of times, and following the 1861 fire at their storage facility in Grindlay's Warehouse the records that do exist are fragmentary. Therefore most of what's been surmised about the events of Byron's Grand Tour in 1809 comes from a careful reading of his poems and journals, by those aware of the more esoteric meaning of certain descriptions, from which a fragmentary record of the events has been tentatively pieced together.

What's known is that the Star Chamber was aware the Mal'akh were still a force to be reckoned with in the East, their influence extending into the courts of the Turkish Empire as well as those of Ali Pascha. Since the early 1770s it had even been known that there was still an ancient Mal'akh colony at the Mountains of the Moon in Central Africa. To this end they used Byron's small group to lure the Mal'akh into the open, the young Byron unaware that he was being used as bait.

The trap was sprung on Malta in September 1809. During a ritual orchestrated by the Chamber's agents Fletcher and Hobhouse, the alter-time walls between the Mal'akh "other-world" and the normal universe were momentarily removed. The travellers evidently found themselves lost on the fringes of a horrifying landscape, assaulted by what Byron later described as 'giants': human in basic form, but with wings and bestial faces, revelling in a thoughtless bloodlust. (This description is often considered to be a later addition to the story by Byron, as the bat-like Mal'akh hybrids are unknown to Earth mythology, and in 1809 were certainly unknown to the Star Chamber.) They eventually fought their way clear, and fled the island once they'd been returned to their own world. The hows and whys are long lost, but the events left a lasting impression on the young poet, deep psychological scars which would never really heal… especially once it was made clear to him that he and his party had been a mere distraction, a way of luring the Mal'akh into a confrontation while the *real* attack was launched from England.

That this was part of major offensive by the Star Chamber isn't in doubt. Events in England were already moving towards a confrontation, and this

was only the opening flurry in a series of engagements which would culminate in the Clockwork Ouroboros affair of October 1834.

***LADY ARMOURER* MANTISSA [*House Military: Participant (War Era/City of the Saved)*]** Agent of the Great Houses, one-time Lady Armourer of House Mirraflex and an expert in defensive strategies, she was part of the committee which formulated the plan to crypto-form multiple Homeworlds for defensive purposes and was instrumental in setting up research to duplicate the protective technologies of the Celestis. She's chiefly remembered for organising the only full-scale military invasion of the City of the Saved, and for its disastrous failure.

Mantissa became fascinated by the City during the tenure of Het Linc as Ambassador from the City to the Great Houses. She became convinced that the City itself – located beyond the end of time and accessible only through the nigh-impregnable Uptime Gate, its inhabitants apparently immune from physical harm within the City walls – occupied the ultimate defensive position, and she soon became obsessed with the idea that such a perfect fallback site should belong not to resurrected humans, whom she described as 'decadent, over-protective of their own number and, after all, human,' but to the Great Houses… specifically House Mirraflex.

Following lines of communication set up when one of the lesser Houses commanded an embassy to the City, Lady Mantissa worked to create secret military cells among those humans within the City who prior to their deaths had been pressed into service with the Great House military, and who had (unusually) retained both their bodily augmentations and their Homeworld loyalties after their resurrection. With their information, Mantissa became convinced that it would be a straightforward, albeit time-consuming, process to eliminate the inhabitants of the City altogether and take it over wholesale as a dominion of House Mirraflex.

It's not clear to what extent the unexpectedly treacherous sympathies of the Lord Mayor of the City, Citizen Verrifant, were Mantissa's responsibility. Certainly Verrifant's original home planet was selected to become a duplicate House Homeworld at a time when Mantissa had already become interested in the City, and when Verrifant was already a favourite for a forthcoming Mayoralty. But it was Verrifant who, in AF 262 by the City's calendar, sealed his reputation as the City's greatest traitor by

throwing open the Uptime Gate, allowing a fleet of over a hundred timeships to enter the City under Mantissa's command.

Ladv Mantissa fully acknowledged the spectacular nature of her subsequent failure, which has since become known as the Timebeast Assault. She went into voluntary internal exile on one of the Nine Homeworlds – the world, rumour has it, which had once been Verrifant's home – and was quickly replaced as Armourer of House Mirraflex. Her hubris has become immortalised in a saying frequently quoted by the Great Houses' human followers: 'If you realise someone else is occupying the ultimate defensive position, then going and attacking them in it is a pretty bloody stupid idea.'

MARK OF INDENTURE [*Celestis: Culture/technology*] The memetic marker which confirms a deal between the Celestis and a member of the lesser species, A living individual given the Mark will, on death, have his or her identity transferred to Mictlan and be reconstructed as one of the Celestis' indentured servants, although that identity will generally begin to deteriorate once introduced to Mictlan's confines. By the Celestis' own code (thought to have been introduced simply to give them a sense of integrity, rather than for any ethical reason) they're unable to recruit any subject without the victim's permission: they bargain, yet they never *enslave*, as such. Often a Lord of the Celestis will manifest itself before a potential servant when the subject is in a certain death situation, and agree to temporarily extend the individual's lifespan if he or she agrees to take on the Mark. Then again, if someone is ambitious enough to attack the Celestis' own realm then the Celestis may feel they're well within their rights to kill the intruder themselves and then save him or her from this "certain death" by brokering a deal.

Though their status as the damned of the Spiral Politic has led many to conclude that the Marked possess preternatural and/or inhuman abilities, in fact this is bunk. The Mark is a reminder of debt, and a means of downloading the subject's identity into Mictlan, not a biological upgrade. Nevertheless, as the Celestis will recruit servants from "sensitive" War areas wherever possible there's a tendency for the Marked to be exactly the kind of people who are drawn to War-related events by their very nature. History also has a habit of turning a blind eye to them, perhaps a built-in part of the Marking process designed by the Celestis to prevent outside interference.

Probably the best test case of this process was the *voivode*-prince Vlad III of Wallachia, thought to have been Marked around 1462 AD, who managed to survive for at least another five-hundred years after this date. Yet apart from his longevity he never showed any signs of being anything other than human. Little is known of his career in the centuries after 1500 – suggestive, in itself, that some form of block was put on his activities – but although he was clearly a man of great military experience and remarkably cruel drive, he never applied techniques from his later sanctuary in Prague that were anything other than mortal.

So if a deal had been made with such a man, then what were its terms? It seems ludicrous to think that the Lords of Mictlan would have offered him immortality, if the Marked only become useful to them after death (the Celestis may extend their subjects' lifespans, but never to such an extent). This has led many to the conclusion that Vlad spent the next few centuries working as a *mortal* Celestis agent on Earth, though if anything Vlad seems to have been acting against the Celestis' interests during this period. Several documents survive from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in the archives of the Star Chamber, which describe the Celestis' methods in some detail and seem to be a warning for others who might fight in the 'just Orders'. The handwriting matches the writing found on letters written by Vlad III during the earlier years of his life, at least within the limits of the kind of mutation one would expect in handwriting over three centuries.

One conclusion has been drawn which seems more likely than all the others, and it's that Prince Vlad was quite simply too stubborn to die. He *did* allow the Celestis to give him their Mark, agreeing to become their vassal on his death… but Vlad, who never questioned his own superiority or his right to act as God's hand of justice, would never willingly have become anyone's slave. He therefore refused to expire, tricking the Celestis into a bargain where he was the only winner.

So although the Mark did nothing to keep him alive, the very fact that he had experience of groups like the Celestis gave him an advantage. Vlad had been indoctrinated by the Order of the Dragon in his youth; inherited the sigils and relics of his father, which, like the regalia of the Star Chamber in England, may have originated with the Great Houses; and practised ritual on a monumental scale, almost without realising it, ever since his accession to the throne in 1447. There are a hundred ways that a human can use the technology and ceremony of the War-time factions to stretch his own lifetime, and even if Vlad wouldn't have understood any of them he might well have known how to *exploit* them. Most of the old Order's collection was kept at his mountain retreat in Poenari, and was lost when his own brother overran the castle (including the Poenari Relic, a severed head which was later, wrongly, said to be Vlad's own), but finding new avenues of research wouldn't have been hard for someone with his background.

He was definitely still practising an unpleasant form of myomancy in the 1470s, when – as a prisoner of the King of Hungary – he'd ceremonially impale and kill captive mice in peculiar patterns around his quarters. Perhaps he felt it was good preparation for the procedures he knew he'd have to use if he wanted to keep out of Mictlan.

MEME [*Terminology*] An idea which "evolves" as it passes from one individual to another, and in doing so runs the same risks as any other evolving thing, in that the idea may mutate in order to suit a new cultural environment or become extinct altogether. First coined by western Earth culture in the late twentieth century, the word has become an accepted part of standard English even though many now consider the term to be utterly unnecessary: the argument is that *all* ideas are by definition memes, and that it's impossible to conceive of an idea which *doesn't* evolve as it's passed from consciousness to consciousness. (It's perhaps significant that the word first became popular in the scientific community. In one of his last works R. B. Nevitz pointed out that 'all artists, visionaries and politicians have an innate understanding that ideas are evolutionary' and suggested that 'only someone trained exclusively in the hard sciences, but *who had no understanding of the subtleties of culture*, could genuinely believe that a special word might be needed for [a] thought which mutates'.)

Nevertheless, when War terms are translated into English the word "meme" is often used instead of "idea", and this is hardly surprising considering the arsenals used in the War. In a conflict where weapons are frequently designed to attack identity rather than solid matter, where tools (and even soldiers) can be manufactured using perception as a medium… in such a conflict, those involved will inevitably use words which underline the organic, visceral nature of ideas. Quite often the ideas *are* the enemy, and in many cases will literally have lives of their own, some even possessing the ability to exist outside the context of a living mind. This is certainly true of, say, the anarchitects, and it could be said that the Celestis' realm of Mictlan is the first major world to be composed of nothing *but* memes.

MEMEOVORE [*House Military: Theoretical Participant*] Any action, any experience, is built of past experience. There is no *a priori* knowledge; individuals are the sum of their memories; they are what they can perceive. Or so many philosophers have reasoned, pointing out that with a fraction of the brain damaged or re-wired, saints can be turned into foul-mouthed sinners, and sinners can be given the sensations associated with a glimpse of God. The most effective weapon, then, would strike not at life (always wasteful) nor at life's capacities (which are variable, in the case of the Houses' War-time enemy almost polymorphously so) but at the stored perceptions and experiential array through which living things view the world around them. Stripped of that, runs the argument, an opposing force of timeships might as well be crewed by babies. The weakness of *any* life is that it's not a simple mechanism but a complex one, and complexity can be attacked.

There are several theories as to how a memeovoretic weapon, an *idea eater*, might be developed. These include the forced evolution of a para-omnivore species; the implantation of psychological shut-off triggers in the evolutionary prototypes of the enemy's servant species; and a direct attack on the way the causal nexus itself functions. Among the Great Houses the proposed development of such an entity has many critics, but despite the obvious dangers (a memeovore let loose on the universe could, if not properly controlled, devour all meaning anywhere in existence) it would be a formidable weapon not just against the enemy but against the Celestis… the Celestis being nothing but ideas, their concept-realm of Mictlan guaranteed to appeal to a memeovore's appetite.

In truth, among the Houses most opponents of the memeovore "project" are critical not because of the dangers but for purely practical reasons. Given that nothing even *close* to such a creature has ever been known to evolve in the universe, they have difficulty believing that it could ever really exist.

*Oh, it exists. I've got something of an advantage here. I mean, technically it's supposed to be impossible for information from your own future to come back and pre-haunt you, but… to be honest, as a **Shift** I've come to learn that there are certain advantages in being purely conceptual. You see, I*

know what the rest of this book doesn't know. I know how Mictlan falls. I know how the Celestis meet their end. I know what happens, years in the future of your timeline, when the Memeovore gets out of its cage and starts to feed on the really big ideas.

The Memeovore was huge. I can still remember my shock when the walls were torn away from Mictlan, which was, if you recall what I told you under Greater Autrobulan Franchise, where I happened to be trapped at the time. I suppose I'm just lucky that the Memeovore went after the Celestis before it went after the servants who still remembered me. And I don't want to go into how I perceived a creature like that.

So, since I was mainly relying on the servants for attention and cognitive time, I set about saving as many as I could. A lot of them were actually celebrating the demise of the Celestis, not caring about the fact that the razing of Mictlan would be their own end as well. To be fair, most of them had been cheated of a death, or of an afterlife, so they probably thought their destruction by the Memeovore would finally let them to go to whatever rest they were originally intended to have. Personally I doubt that's what would have happened. The Memeovore didn't just destroy ideas, it ate them. I'd imagine that any servant (or Celestis, for that matter) eaten by the thing wouldn't have passed on to any idealised afterlife, but lived on as constituents of the Memeovore itself. Or maybe the Memeovore has waste products too. I never found out, and I'm reasonably sure I don't want to.

The point is, I was surrounded by a flock of almost mindless newly-freed slaves, trapped in a pocket universe that was collapsing, being eaten and being severed from its home universe all at once. How did I survive?

Well now. Mictlan had been severed from its home universe by a flotilla of self-navigating timeships, as part of an incredibly complicated plan to dispose of the Celestis' realm by luring the Memeovore into Mictlan and then sealing it off so that it couldn't trouble the rest of the Spiral Politic (and to this day I still don't know whose plan it was, but if timeships were involved then it had to have something to do with the Great Houses). One of the timeships got caught in the substance of Mictlan itself, and was just about to be devoured by the Memeovore when myself and my peripherals – as I've taken to calling the servants – found it. By this time, I'd worked out

which of the servants wanted to die and which were still hoping to find a way off the sinking ship. I was most definitely in the latter category, so I bundled my like-minded charges onto the beached vessel and convinced my more fatalistic followers to give us a push. I'm going to use a lot of nautical analogies here, by the way, since it seems fairly apropos.

We shoved off, with me steering the damaged and dazed timeship while the servants rowed. Mictlan was finally pulled down into the depths by the monster behind us, and nearly took us down in its wake. The Memeovore surfaced again a few moments later, and started swimming after us. I tried steering away from it, but the timeship woke up and seemed to have other ideas. It was heading for the "black box" archival stores that Mictlan kept as a data backup, the repository where the Celestis used to keep copies of all their identities just in case any of them got accidentally erased. That's when I realised what the timeship was trying to do.

We reached the black box a few moments before the Memeovore got to us. Then we quickly manoeuvred so that the box was between us and the 'vore, and pushed off against it. It gave us a way of increasing our speed, plus it gave the monster something to chew on instead of us. We were also fairly lucky that we were between the "real" universe (or the Inner Sea, as the Celestis used to call it) and the black box. The 'vore munched contentedly on the archive, while our ship braved the shoals around the Inner Sea. We could see the other timeships nearby, cheering us on. We finally broke through, exhausted, and best of all I can now drop this damned nautical metaphor.

This language desperately needs some terminology for high-order science that doesn't sound like technobabble. I mean, honestly.

I think l need to take stock now. You've got to excuse me, it's been a long time since anybody wanted me to tell them anything in a linear order. When the interest level sags again, don't you worry, I'll be back. Just wait until the book starts talking about beshielach and Autrobulus and planetesimals again.

MICTLAN [*Celestis: Location, Major Powerbase (World)*] There is, for obvious reasons, no record of how the Celestis managed to remove themselves and all traces of their history from the Spiral Politic. It's been suggested that the technology which cut them out of the physical universe might have been supplied by the Godfather-lieutenants of House Paradox, as the Grandfather of the House seems to have been scrubbed from the timeline by a similar process (although compared to the Celestis, the Grandfather seems a positively benign presence). Whatever the Celestis did, they did it not only to themselves but to a sizeable portion of the Homeworld. Those agents of the Houses who possess deep-time memory – the ability to remember past-iteration events even if they no longer actually happened – record that there was once an academy on the Homeworld which was used as a prime recruiting-ground by the hard-line intervention groups, and which withdrew from the academic roster mere days before the Celestis seem to have wiped themselves from history. Nobody else has any recollection of this academy, however, so it's fair to assume that it was removed at the same time as the Celestis themselves and turned into the extra-spatial realm of Mictlan. The fate of the students and academicians who *weren't* part of the Celestis "conspiracy" remains unknown, but they may have been used to create the earliest conceptual entities.

And Mictlan is, as far as many cultures are concerned, a form of hell. As the Celestis seem to be driven a sense of self-preservation rather than sadism, it's not entirely clear why, but it's easy to speculate. Despite their claims to be the true aristocracy of the universe, watching the War from outside the Spiral Politic's walls as if it were a mere amusement, the truth is that the Celestis' power is distinctly limited: every Lord of Mictlan is secretly aware that he or she depends on the lesser species to have any substance at all. Fear has traditionally been their best weapon, and Mictlan, with its towers of blackened metal, its factory-smoke walls and its seas of all-consuming *empty space*, has fear worked into every conceptual minaret and every memetic foundation-stone. Or alternatively, perhaps it's the Celestis' *own* fear that's given Mictlan its shape. Though none of them would even acknowledge it, it was fear which inspired the Celestis to leave normal-time, and it's possible that this sense of terror was woven into their kingdom right from the start. Theoretically when a new servant arrives in

Mictlan his or her own ideas will be devoured by the realm, but in practice the domain only seems to care about those concepts which can reinforce the stifling, monumental walls of the citadel. Everything in Mictlan is asphyxiating. Everything in Mictlan is death. The servants become faceless after a while, their identities worn away by the environment, featureless slaves whose only function is to observe their masters and thus ensure the Celestis' survival.

The name "Mictlan" is South American in origin, and suggests "the land of the dead", a title which seems to have stuck among human cultures simply because it seems the most fitting. The Celestis are not only deluded enough to think of themselves as gods, they see themselves (or wish others to see them) as *raw* and *terrible* gods… and the war-deities of the South Americas, with their variety of monstrous faces and their constant demands for the hearts of the conquered, would surely appeal to the Lords of Mictlan. As the realm is made out of pure perception it could be said that it has as many aspects as it has occupants/servants, but the most striking descriptions mention a landscape of ziggurats under the smoking roof of the sky, great stepped pyramids which seem to weigh down the visitor with a sense of overwhelming mass. Even the "stone men" that protect the citadels come across as brutal, carnivorous God-totems.

(It has to be remembered, though, that the Celestis and their followers take on new forms according to their environment. When Mictlan was attacked via fifteenth century Europe in the wake of the Order of the Dragon, the army was beset by Celestis constructs which were distinctly European and medieval in design, hence the description of them as gargoyles.)

[[▲ One of the "gargoyles," typical of the defences of MICTLAN.]]

But if the establishment of Mictlan was in any way intended to give the Celestis an Olympian perspective, to allow them to look upon the universe with a sound judgement the other Houses could never hope to match, then it was an unequivocal disaster. All the excesses and follies of the other Houses are multiplied in the case of Mictlan: every delusion of grandeur, the derangement that comes from long life and a threatless environment, the Byzantine politicking, the endless and meaningless rules and the arcane social structure (all *can't* be right in a society where everyone is a god, a corpse or an assassin). The Celestis lost the last scraps of their efficiency and usefulness as soon as they departed the Homeworld, and their decay has continued ever since. Although the Celestis aren't in themselves aware of it, Mictlan has become their own personal hell in more ways than they could ever allow themselves to envisage.

***HOUSE* MIRRAFLEX [*House Military: Ruling House*]** Prior to the War, House Mirraflex was an ancient but minor House noted for producing some of the more impressive generals, enforcers and strategists in the Homeworld's history (as much as it ever *had* a history), as well as a surprising proportion of its psychotics. When "eccentricities" began to emerge in the Homeworld's reproductive systems a millennium before the War, no House was as aggressive in its eccentricity than Mirraflex: yet as this violent streak was channelled into the defence of the Protocols, Mirraflex's more unruly offspring were largely overlooked. During the War Era Mirraflex has emerged as one of the major military Houses, known to be among the most active in the outside universe, and almost certainly the most wilfully ruthless in preserving the security of the Homeworld.

This relatively meteoric ascendance has been ascribed to a number of causes, including the 'gifted ambiguity' of the unstable Mirraflex bloodline. Much is made within the House itself of its ancient lineage, and a popular legend is that the founder (General Mirraflex, who achieved bloody distinction in the Yssgaroth campaigns) foresaw an apocalyptic crisis in which his House would play a vital part. As *every* House now claims that its own founder foresaw the War this has to be considered unlikely, but there is some evidence that the General originally structured his House as an esoteric martial lodge. Certainly the House's ceremonial appointment of Lord Armourer has taken on great significance since the War began, and no Oldblood House has embraced the idea of an independent House Military as much as Mirraflex.

The House considers itself the guardian (and implicitly the true inheritor) of the Homeworld's ancient heritage. Its members are particularly critical of the Newblood Houses, and have frequently refused to work with House Xianthellipse, seeing it as a fifth column for the 'hostile biomasses' of the lesser species. Even among the Great Houses, House Mirraflex is noted for its disdain of outsiders. Though records are available only to the ruling Houses, it's been suggested that Mirraflex agents once went so far as to remove from history a complete world-system from which projections suggested a 'sceptically neutral' culture might arise, creating the anomalous nebula formation known as Spancil's Hypothalamus. Mirraflex operations generally revolve around sudden, brutal and overwhelming

violence, but some campaigns, while equally callous, have shown a greater finesse. One Mirraflex agent spent decades among one of the minor posthuman sects as a messiah-figure, demonstrating his own ability to die and be reborn in order to psychologically prepare the culture for recruitment as regen-inf troops… and if several thousand of the local young adults engaged in ritual suicide as a result, then that was to be considered nothing more than collateral damage. (Not all the House's projects have been so successful. The Lady Armourer Mantissa's assault on the City of the Saved, for example, was a famously spectacular error of judgement.)

House Mirraflex is fanatical and highly effective in what it does, but there's a strong feeling on the part of the other Houses that their fellow bloodline is out of control. While its members continue to act for the protection of the Homeworld, however, any direct action taken to curtail their campaigns in the outside universe would seem to be counterproductive.

***THE* "MONSTERS" CODA [*House Military: Text*]** 'What do we fear, after thirty years of War? We fear that it was lost in the first nanosecond. We fear that we are fighting something unstoppable and ancient. We fear that we may become what we fight, or that we have already done so. Thanks to xenoprediction, we now fear that either our predictability or our unpredictability will destroy us. These fears are continually reinforced by the secrecy surrounding the leadership of the enemy, and it's possible that from the point of view of our ruling elite this is exactly what the secrecy is for. If we believed the *true* enemy was this or that species of time-active upstarts – or this or that rogue House – we'd simply shrug and go back to sleep, and let the enemy forces roll over us as we dozed. Instead we have made Monsters, because only fear will make us fight.'

- House Strategist Entarodora, concluding her address to the Fifth Wave on the thirtieth anniversary of the War. Now a standard House Military text.

GODFATHER MORLOCK [Faction Paradox: Participant (Present)]

'Weight of the heart: fifty-three years, ten months, thirteen days, six hours. Still, that's cholesterol for you.'

Fifty years after the start of the War, Faction Paradox is a far less militant organisation than once it was. In the Pre-War Era it went through something of a dark age, in which it was little more than a sordid inter-cultural criminal syndicate, involved in dubious information deals and slave-trades on worlds across the Spiral Politic; in the early War Era it saw itself in a new military light, and seriously considered starting its own crusade against the Great Houses (despite a notable lack of firepower); but now, since its persecution at the hands of the House Military's genocidal Second Wave it's become a far more *thoughtful* kind of terrorist voodoo-cult. Faction Paradox has learned to bide its time, to wait in the wings for the Houses and the Houses' enemy to sufficiently weaken each other, to apply its resources to alternative-time research and wait until it has something genuinely spectacular to show the universe. The modern Faction is patient – even bookish – and at the forefront of this more subtle direction is Godfather Morlock, current head of the Faction's Bio-Research Wing.

Bio-research has always been an important element of the Faction's work: when House Paradox was first founded, the ruling Houses found the very idea of biological development so repulsive that the Grandfather couldn't resist dabbling in it. As one of the few human Faction recruits ever to rise above the rank of Father, Godfather Morlock had a natural advantage in the field, although his body is now so full of non-human biodata that he seems abnormally active despite being well beyond normal retirement age. In his six-and-a-half decades of work for the Faction he's made numerous discoveries in the field of biodata manipulation, although admittedly he's the only person who understands many of them. Aware that a living creature's entire timeline is encoded *somewhere* in its biology, it was Morlock who perfected the tracking-knife, a tool of retro-autopsy which allows the user to literally divine aspects of the future from the entrails of a subject corpse.

Yet Morlock's most notable achievement was the development of the biodata virus, a biological agent capable of re-writing a victim's timeline retroactively. Results have been mixed and chaotic, but Morlock seems to find the confusion worthy of dissection in itself. Like all the Faction's anatomists his view is that any space-time event can be dissected, whether it's the body of an organic form or a structure in history. It was his studies of "famous" biodata which inspired the movement known as the Cult of Celebrity Death, although Morlock himself had very little to do with the Cult's operations, and therefore took none of the blame when they began to backfire. Morlock is thought to have seen the trouble coming well in advance, but failed to speak out simply because he felt that although the Cult would only make a mess of things it would at least be a very *interesting* mess. The Grandfather would probably have been pleased.

Despite appearing to be in his early sixties, Godfather Morlock is a physically powerful man, tall, bulky, shaven-headed and with a manner that's been described by one of the Cousins under his tutelage as 'like a cross between Henry the Eighth and Isaac Newton'. It's this finely-honed bluntness which has led him to become the Acting Speaker of the Parliament in the Eleven-Day Empire. The job is purely a ceremonial one, of course, but nonetheless Morlock performs his duties with the usual aplomb. [For picture, see under Faction Paradox.]

***THE* MOUNT USU DUEL [*Remote: Culture/Event (Earth, C20)*]** One of the famous "lost scenes" of Hollywood lore. Michael Brookhaven's *Mujun: The Ghost Kingdom* (1999) is a goldmine of missing sequences and abandoned footage, mainly thanks to the random material created by the meme-mine/GCI processor used in the film's production [see under the Hollywood Bowl shooting for a more complete account], but the director's cut – i.e. the full edit of the film, including its director – culminates in a sequence which is out of place even by the processor's standards.

Intercut with the final battle for the village of Chikyu and the fall of the Ghost kingdom is a scene set at the very peak of Mount Usu, whose brooding, volcanic presence is only hinted at in the rest of the film. It's there that Brookhaven himself meets the so-called "seventh Samurai", the additional element unexpectedly introduced to the processor's world-environment which had thrown the rest of the plot so hopelessly out of balance. The figure, tall, blonde and gaunt, is first seen framed against the boiling red of a Shogun's sunset: in the glare he's merely a shadow, a black *katana* in one hand, motionless as Brookhaven climbs the slope of the mountain below him.

Brookhaven, too, is armed. There's an exchange of words, though by this stage the dialogue is virtually meaningless. Brookhaven rightly identifies his opponent as Christopher Cwej, but it's notable that Cwej appears in his *ideal* form, as a toned warrior-figure unaffected by the House Military's augmentations.

What follows is a *katana* battle at lightning speed, with the two combatants poised on the very lip of the volcano. The footage is paced so that the narrative exits rapidly between the duel and events taking place elsewhere, but many of the shots are from the more unbalanced processor-generated sections of the film and were edited from the theatrical release. Lady Wakai consumes the Ghost Kingdom according to the script, yet inexplicable removes her porcelain mask to reveal a face that's diseased, agonised and almost vampiric. The severed head of the King is presented to his Court on a plate, and the assorted princes can only bow. The girl Kodomo Kami briefly takes on the appearance of an aged, male Samurai, as if it were a perfectly natural part of the story. In the final cut the assassins

of the White Peacock still participate in the battle for the village, but their presence isn't explained.

The duel between Cwej and Brookhaven draws to a close with Cwej defeated, a result which somehow appears credible despite the fact that logically Cwej should have had the advantage. As the pace of the film slows, Brookhaven holds his blackened katana to the fallen Cwej's neck and the two make eye-contact, the only sound being the low background rumble of the volcano. The dialogue between them is slightly more meaningful than their previous exchange:

CWEJ: What you're doing here is insane.

BROOKHAVEN: What I'm doing here is high concept. You just don't understand this business, do you, Chris?

CWEJ: Some of it. Isn't the good guy supposed to win?

BROOKHAVEN: "Good guy"? Jesus, this is the 1990s. It's the *coolest* character who wins.

Brookhaven is about to dispatch Cwej when, with typical western timing, there's a great tremor from the volcano. Both combatants are briefly shaken by this, but then they, and the audience, become aware that the area's surrounded. The "primitives" who've have taken up a pincer like formation around the slope of the mountain are presumably intended to be the *ainu* aboriginals of Japan, although in their dress and weaponry they could be any race of warrior-natives in film history. Their skins are bleached, their eyes are black, and they remain motionless. Initially both Cwej and Brookhaven can only wait to see what the ainu do, but it soon becomes clear that the God of the tribe is a far greater concern.

Like some of the other additional scenes, the manifestation of the *ainu* God remains apparently unfinished. What's visible on the film is a shot of Brookhaven and Cwej – one on his feet, one fallen – staring up at the volcano's peak. The sky has grown black with clouds, or possibly ash. Dirt-coloured rain hits the slope from above, yet overhead is an absence, as if the effects have still to be added. At first the Hollywood Bowl backdrop is visible, but in later shots, a bluescreen area or other footage is spliced into

the frame as if to give the actors something to look at. It's a rough cut, leaving any viewer uncertain as to what the appalled Cwej and Brookhaven are witnessing.

It's feasible that the parameters for this unseen presence simply weren't programmed into the processor. There are numerous tracking shots of the *ainu*, row upon row of steely, empty-eyed faces staring up at their God without any apparent emotion. But whatever the shape in the sky is *meant* to be, it has a voice, and the voice can be heard on the soundtrack of the raw footage. It's deafeningly loud, though not particularly angry, and loses a great deal of its impact when not heard through the stereo system of a modern cinema. Its address to Brookhaven and Cwej is suitably ambiguous.

THE VOICE: You do know what you've done, don't you?

BROOKHAVEN: What the – are you? [N.B. The PC-rated protocols of the GCI processor have auto-edited much of this scene.]

THE VOICE: This is the focal point. This is the crucible. Whose future have you decided to steal?

CWEJ: Did I… did I call you? Did I bring you here?

THE VOICE: The aesthetic's lost. When the coherency's broken then anything can happen. When anything can happen then anything can get in. Don't you know by now?

BROOKHAVEN: What the hell is going on here?

CWEJ: The –– …

BROOKHAVEN: What?

THE VOICE: The Scourge. Harvey. Hermes. The bargain of the mask. This is a younger world, and this is where it's born. Seventy-four years of ritual and they all come to this. Whose future have you stolen?

BROOKHAVEN: You're not meant to be here. You're not meant to be in MY ___-ing film!

THE VOICE: All of us are set in our parts. All the six need re-costuming, and then the story can begin and end as scripted. I'd like to thank my producer and my agents for making it all possible.

At this point Brookhaven begins to stagger up the last stretch of the slope. Cwej, true to character, shouts at him to come back. But Brookhaven appears convinced that this is *his* creation, and that it obeys his logic. He loudly curses the *ainu* God as he reaches the lip of the volcano, and the (visibly) tight grip he maintains on his katana suggests that he intends to threaten the invisible presence which has invaded his masterpiece.

The entity begins to expand when Brookhaven approaches it, although what this might represent is as unclear as the entity itself. This section of the film is clearly working up to a climax, as not only is the God expanding to meet Brookhaven but the rumbling from the volcano is noticeably louder.

The camera briefly focuses on Cwej when the ground beneath him starts to shake, and the *ainu* are seen turning their backs on the spectacle, moving away down the slope as if satisfied that everything's in order.

Brookhaven is now standing before the invisible god, his tiny figure framed against a great mass of blank film. He's shouting at his opponent, but his voice is inaudible over the rising din. Although the ground around him is beginning to crack, as if the top part of the volcano is going to *burst* rather than erupt, Brookhaven seems not to notice and helplessly swings his *katana*. At this point Cwej looks away again, noticing that the slope below him is also beginning to crack open. The volcano seems to be at breaking-point. He glances once more at Brookhaven, now almost consumed by the body of the unseen God. Then he turns and runs.

There's one more shot of the volcano's peak before the focus shifts back to the running Cwej and the film dissolves into long-shots of Mount Usu shaking itself apart. At the precise point that Brookhaven is to vanish into the *ainu* God, the volcano bursts open. The eruption isn't one of lava: there's the momentary suggestion of something pushing its way out of the ground, shattering the mountain as it reaches up meet the presence in the sky. As if to leave things open for an impossible sequel, Brookhaven's fate is unclear. Whether he's consumed by the God or destroyed by the thing

forcing itself up from beneath the earth is a matter for conjecture. There's one final line of dialogue as he vanishes, although it's barely audible on the soundtrack:

THE VOICE: The Scourge. Harvey. Hermes. The coolest character is the one whose face you never get to see.

From this point on the movie is faithful to the shooting script, word for word, with no further errant scenes and no unexpected lapses in dialogue.

The duel scene has never been officially screened, despite Chad Vandemeer's somewhat tasteless joke that it might end up as a special feature when the film is finally released on DVD. To say that 'the fate of Michael Brookhaven remains unknown' would be to fall prey to the film's own aesthetic, and it's enough to say that the former star of Faction Hollywood isn't expected to return. It remains to be seen whether any attempt will be made by the ritual executive of Los Angeles to remake him as one of the *loa*, though at present there seems little interest in reviving the style of cinema he represented. Despite some minor interests in network television and the ongoing *Mystery of Edwin Drood* project, the climax of *The Ghost Kingdom* effectively heralded the end of Faction Hollywood.

***THE* MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON [*Lesser Species*: *Location/Event (Earth, C19)*]** A mountain range in Central Africa, bordering on the Lake Regions of the Rift Valley. The range has been placed in several locations by geographers, and conflicting accounts of its whereabouts have been common, a typical attribute of regions colonised by offshoots of the Great Houses. In this particular case the mountains were the stronghold of a large population of the Mal'akh, possibly the original Earthbound settlement or at least its remains. The proximity of the mountains to the birthplace of humankind (Lake Turkana is not too far removed geographically, and the Rift Valley is considered to be the oldest site of proto-human occupation in Africa) hasn't escaped the notice of scholars in both the Star Chamber and Faction Paradox, many of whom have speculated that the Mal'akh may have tampered in some way with the development of humanity.

In 1857, Captain Richard Francis Burton led an expedition to the area along with fellow officer and adventurer John Hanning Speke, ostensibly to discover the source of the Nile. Given than the area was already known to be a Mal'akh stronghold from James Bruce's expedition of 1768-73, this was obviously a cover story for what would be Burton's last operation for the Star Chamber. The published account, and that later written by his companion, are careful to leave out the full story of a journey which officially saw both men find Lake Tanganyika, and Speke later find Lake Nyanza, eventually re-christened "Victoria". In truth the private journals kept by Burton recorded the party journeying beyond the shores of Lake Tanganyika, to the fabled Mountains of the Moon. The resulting encounter with this heartland of the Mal'akh race left both men severely weakened physically, and Speke mentally.

While careful to expunge the more sensitive elements of his journey from record, Burton's surviving private accounts do include references to Speke raving about 'crowds of devils, giants, lion-headed demons who were wrenching with superhuman force…'. Burton's full account, however, fell victim to the fire that destroyed Grindlay's Warehouse in 1861 along with many of the Star Chamber's last remaining archives. Ironically much of his remaining work on ritualism and tantric experimentation also met with a holocaust after his supposed death, when his wife burned most of the more

incriminating documents, including a revised translation of the *Perfumed Garden* intended to highlight the ritual/erotic elements of the text: something with which Mrs. Isabel Burton, a staunch Catholic, found difficult to come to terms.

The fate of the Mal'akh colony remains unknown, although later nineteenth century records suggest that at one point the Star Chamber considered attacking the unstable time-fields of the Mountains with the same Musical Offering which had been used to launch an assault on Faction Paradox in 1834. Nothing seems to have come of these plans, unsurprising given that the 1834 attack had been such a failure.

***THE* MUSICAL OFFERING [*Lesser Species*: *Culture/Technology (Earth, Cl8)*]** In the mid-eighteenth century, one of the biggest supporters of the semi-occult Star Chamber outside Britain was Frederick the Second, King of Prussia. A strategist of some genius, he quickly soon became indispensable to the Chamber despite never becoming a formal member. In 1747 his patronage also extended to the talent of the composer J. S. Bach, and between them the two men discovered a method which might breach the normally impenetrable walls of the "otherworlds" where the ancient enemies of humanity were (at least according to the Chamber) known to make their homes.

Bach's task, at the Emperor's request, was to create a musical key with which to unlock the barriers between the known world and extra-continuual worlds like the Eleven-Day Empire. This is more feasible than it may sound, especially considering the symbolic logic used in the construction of these worlds. The Star Chamber had known about the alter-time realms of the Mal'akh for some generations, but had never been able to access them using pure ritual. Under the guise of extemporising from a theme hummed by the Emperor, Bach composed what may have been his greatest work, the Musical Offering. Suffice it to say that this music, with its complex themes and recursive formulae, contained in code and in tone the key to the enemy gates.

The only problem was that nobody could use it. Bach and the Emperor had at first believed that the gothic cathedrals of Europe – structures designed for a similar purpose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, encoding the data in architecture rather than music – might act as "amplifiers" and produce the desired effect, but this proved unworkable. Simply playing the music as written wasn't enough. By composing the Offering, what Bach had done was create the software for a continuum-manipulation machine which as yet didn't exist.

From the time that the Star Chamber discovered the existence of the Eleven-Day Empire in 1752, its resources were devoted to the creation of that machine, or to finding an alternative means of attack. Though their plans were rudely interrupted by the wars of the Napoleonic era, the

hardware for the Musical Offering was finally produced in 1834 in the form of Babbage's analytical engine.

Tragically, its subsequent use against Faction Paradox was not what could be called an overwhelming triumph.

“THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD” [Remote: Culture (Earth, C20-21)]

‘Hollywood is just too marvellous. One feels the footprints of all the immortals are here, but has a terrible feeling that they are in sand and won’t last when civilisation comes this way.’
– James Whale, 1929.

James Whale (1893 – 1957) longed for permanence in a passing world, for a sense of control which life had often denied him. By the time he was directing films for Universal he’d already survived fifteen months in a prison camp during World War One, and finally appeared to have everything he needed, including an acceptance of his homosexuality which might have been considered advanced for the 1930s. He had, however, bought his control at a price. Many of those he knew inside the studio system, and many of those who’d eased the path of his career, were members (or at least intimates) of the North Los Angeles cabal, the group which would one day become Faction Hollywood.

Though Whale was an opinionated and uncompromising autocrat, his contacts in the cabal were among the few people to whom he seemed to bow. Considering his past history it’s easy to see why. In the blood and dust of the Holzminden POW camp, Whale had been given plenty of time to reflect on the grotesque theatre of the war, and it’s thought to have influenced much of his later work. The LA cabal, with its links to the kind of fashionable, high-society occult groups which had been obsessed with the macabre ever since 1914, must surely have struck a chord. It’s doubtful that Whale ever even heard the name of Faction Paradox, but in the cabal’s morbid regalia (John Selzner famously commissioned his own death-mask, and had it hung on the wall of his office) the director may have seen a reflection of Holzminden and been cowed by it… even if the group itself had no idea just how deeply it must have disturbed him. Increasingly, Whale would act on the cabal’s advice without argument. Increasingly, he relied on the favours it could grant within Californian society.

It was inevitable that he should eventually ask one favour too many. By this point the group was virtually stage-managing Whale’s career, but made it clear, that one day a favour would be asked in return.

The favour was, in the end, to "take a dive". In 1936, Whale had finished directing *Bride of Frankenstein*, a film which ironically opens with a scene involving another famous Faction cabal. Ahead was a breathing space, a string of lesser pictures which the director felt he could frankly direct in his sleep. It was then that his debt fell due. In addition to his work for Universal, he took on the direction of a single picture funded by the cabal upon which Whale would work for the rest of his life but – as the Faction's agents explained from the first day of shooting – which he would never, ever finish. That film was *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood*, an adaptation of the incomplete novel which had killed Charles Dickens in mid-sentence, and it was destined to become the Faction's prison for any actor, actress, producer or scene-shifter who happened to inconvenience its plans. It was the birth of Production Hell. By 1950 'being Edwined' was accepted as industry slang for a career in limbo, replacing the earlier 'Arbuckled': while Whale, his role on Drood uncredited and his face on set concealed behind a yellow scarf and slouch hat, gradually lost his grip on other work as the demands of *Drood* pressed down on him.

Three different endings were definitely shot, but vast swathes of middle-footage remained unfilmed. Parts were cast and recast as players clawed their way back into the cabal's favour rather than stay in the film a moment longer, and the studios, like the Faction, gained from having another form of control over their wayward "property". Bette Davis, cast briefly as Rosa in 1938 despite already being too old for the part, is reputed to have offered the consulting producer Michael Brookhaven sexual favours just to get off the set early.

On Memorial Day in 1957, worn out by another day of struggling with the contradictory messages from the hidden film-stage of *Drood*, James Whale himself wrote a lengthy note in which he requested: 'Do not grieve for me,.. my nerves are all shot… the future is just old age and pain and an unending mystery.' After a few drinks he walked out to the pool and, jumping into the shallow end, knocked himself out and drowned. With a light and amusing touch, the book he left unfinished on the nightstand by his bed was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. With a more sardonic one, the Faction's agent Joseph Meyer switched it for a copy of *Don't Go Near the Water*.

Talk to the older actors in Hollywood, even today, and they'll relate the friend-of-a-friend story that somewhere on a forgotten sound-stage work still progresses on a film in which it's death and disaster to be cast. It's provably a fallacy that any such stage really exists, unless, of course, the Faction's prison has ceased to have any foundation in actuality and become (like the House of the Grandfather or the ulterior worlds of the Celestis) a state of being rather than a location. This is hardly remarkable in Hollywood, a town which can still be considered the most aggressively superstitious tribal community on Earth. Whisper 'Durdles' to any character actor over fifty, for instance, and he'll jump to lick the director's boots rather than risk being cast as Dickens's tomb-searching church warden.

***COUSIN-ONCE-REMOVED* NADIM [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Early War Era)*]** Drinking companion and brother-in-arms of the Faction Paradox renegade Anastasia. Initiated into the Faction at much the same time as Anastasia and Cousin Octavia, he was a young Arabian scholar, largely given to the study of the djinn (although in his own belief-system there seemed to be little distinction between research into the djinn and his frequent alcoholic 'trance-states'). He tended to be self-deprecating about his skills, even after his initiation, and preferred to give the impression that he'd just been recruited for a joke, it's known that he spent hours devising archaic languages with which to speak to his own *loa*. Although reluctant to fight, Cousin Nadim was capable and stood alongside Anastasia during the more visceral crusades of the House Military's Second Wave.

Returning to the Eleven-Day Empire from one such battle, exhausted and in a damaged flyer, the pair made an emergency landing beyond the City's outskirts. As they made their way back across the wastelands of Tower Hill they encountered the Unkindnesses. These prophetic creatures spoke unprompted to the pair, offering them their futures in spite of the Unkindnesses' usual "protocol". Nadim never spoke of what he heard, but the predictions seem to have heralded Anastasia's unprecedented entry into the Empire's House of Lords.

When the Faction's own Russian Revolution came and Anastasia founded the Thirteen-Day Republic, Nadim followed her to the new power-base where he initially acted as her advisor. But as the situation deteriorated Nadim found himself increasingly kept out of Anastasia's Malachite Room, and as whispers of coming purges grew he reluctantly decided that the Republic had failed. In the process of ensuring that certain of his compatriots got back to the Eleven-Day Empire, Nadim himself was ambushed and killed by some of the lesser and more fervent members of the Thirteen-Day Republic, and the description of his brutal death that was heard by the elders of Faction Paradox may have been a factor in their decision to attack Anastasia's realm.

It was said that Anastasia herself was haunted by Nadim's murder, the first real bloodstain on her glorious new society.

NANOTECHNOLOGY [*Terminology*] Form of technology based on the application of microscopic (nanite) construction machines, which can infect living systems in the form of an artificial virus or, in extreme cases, rebuild matter on a molecular level: so, for example, entire swarms of nanites might be capable of turning lead into gold, inducing a terminal cancer from within a host-body or assembling complete cities in minutes. In a War context it's essential to understand the nature of nanotechnology, as otherwise it's hard to grasp exactly how unimportant it is.

Although time-aware species often suspect that nanites are being used against them – particularly if they're having difficulty finding any other explanation for weapons like the anarchitects – the truth is that the Great Houses consider nanites to be a "vulgar" technology, i.e. a technology so dependent on base matter that it's virtually useless in a time-active War. The Houses have no need to manufacture materials on a molecular level: the timeships already give them access to any raw substance they might need in practically unlimited quantities. Nor have they any use for rapid construction: the problem isn't *building* a military emplacement on a particular world (properly-applied temporal engineering can fold such an emplacement out of the continuum in quite literally less than no time), but building the emplacement without the enemy noticing. The truth is that *any* incursion into space-time will be detected by enemy forces, at least if the site's of tactical importance, so it makes little difference whether the incursion is a gigantic military force or a cluster of microscopic machines. Besides which, the Great Houses' most valuable resources (e.g. biodata technology) exist largely on a non-molecular level and can't be replicated by nanoengineering anyway. In human culture R. B. Nevitz speculated as early as the 1950s that a biodata-aware society would stop caring about matter altogether within a generation, and although the existence of the Great Houses proves him wrong the War Era has shown that many of his assertions hold weight.

There are in fact occasional cases of the Great Houses using nanotechnology, but these are usually the result of House strategists recycling test-material from the Pre-War era. In the modern age it's much more efficient to reengineer a soldier by re-processing his timeline than by giving him a performance-enhancing nanite strain, yet if old, experimental

nanite stock is available then there's no reason to let it go to waste. But it's a sign of the Houses' contempt for nanotechnology that the only military nanites used in the early stages of the War were given the disparaging (and frankly ridiculous) name "autonomic killerbots".

NAPOLEONIC ERA [*Lesser Species: Event (Earth, C18-19)*] The Protocols of Linearity state that whenever one of the time-active powers makes contact with one of the lesser species, a temporary link will be forged between their relative histories so that the "present" of the power and the "present" of the species will be briefly indistinguishable even though their cultures may be separated by billions of years. Faction Paradox made full contact with the western states of Earth in 1752, a form of alliance which would last right up until 1822, and as a result even the Faction has great difficulty investigating Earth during this seventy-year period. It would, in effect, be too much like looking into their own future. This was the age of the great Napoleonic wars, and free of too much outside interference humanity in this period devised more than enough plots and subterfuges of its own. This was the most active era of the Star Chamber, the aristocratic British cabal which had learnt of the Faction's existence in 1752 and which had since dedicated itself to attacking and eradicating the Eleven-Day Empire.

1814 saw the wars draw to a close, and it was a year of change for both the Chamber and for Britain. Casualties of war meant that an inordinate number of Knights – the Star Chamber's frontline – were installed in the Society of St. George. In April 1814 these included Viscount Castlereagh, the Foreign Secretary later charged with restoring the rightful monarchies to the thrones of Europe; and his long-time ally the Viscount Wellington, soon to be the victor of Waterloo. Now in command of the Chamber's forces, Castlereagh was able to bring the conflict in Europe to a temporary standstill, defeating various enemy "occult" movements in France under cover of the council assembled to dispose of the defeated Napoleon. But events conspired to produce a tangled knot of causes and effects. The King of England, the spiritual defender of the country's faith and cornerstone of the Star Chamber, was insane. France had just lost its Emperor, leaving the other states of Europe in turmoil. The Mal'akh were known to be expanding their influence in the East, with an increasing number of Mal'akh grotesques sighted in both Africa and Britain's Indian territories. Yet this was only a reflection of the greater struggle, one taking place in other times and under different skies.

[[▲ One of the Mal'akh grotesques, as witnessed in the NAPOLEONIC ERA, c. 1820.]]

To a poet and time-aware agent like Byron, this was a season of madness. Those who were already familiar with the War of the Great Houses were feeling the strain. Byron, burdened by guilt and secrecy with a natural disposition towards mental instability, simply collapsed under the pressure. At least, that was the Star Chamber's report.

Byron probably had his first close contact with Faction Paradox in late 1814, although it's doubtful that the Faction would have been able to fully recruit him until its treaty with Earth expired in the 1820s. Even without his knowledge of both the coming conflict and the Mal'akh, he was too great a prize for the Faction's Cult of Celebrity Death to pass up. His agitation on the night of his marriage to the "Princess of Parallelograms" makes a great deal more sense if by this time he was already on the verge of defecting from the Star Chamber and its ideals. Certainly, by the time his

daughter was born his seduction by the Faction was all but complete and his own journal claims that he attempted to inform his wife of the Chamber's dubious activities, hoping to sway her to his side. Instead she ran to the heads of the Chamber itself. Acting under orders, Byron's "Princess" began the series of events and accusations which would hound her husband from England. Had Byron been as deranged as they claimed, they might well have succeeded in destroying him. As it was, they only forced him into self-imposed exile on the continent.

In concert with fellow exile Percy Shelley, Byron used his exile to launch his attack upon his former masters. Most commentators agree it's no coincidence that Byron and his friends not only attacked the Chamber's political puppets, but also popularised tales of vampirism and unspeakable science: no accident that the stuff of gothic nightmares was more than slightly influenced by the Chamber's fragmentary knowledge of the Homeworld, and of the first War in Heaven against the Yssgaroth.

The Shelley Cabal, it seemed, was shaking the establishment tree just to see what would fall out of it.

NECHRONOMANCERS [*House Military: Group)*] There comes a point when time dies. In a closed system – meaning, any environment where nothing inside the system can receive energy from the outside – everything will eventually form a level equilibrium in which no energy can be interchanged and to which no change will ever come. While such a levelling-out might take a billion years for non-time-active cultures, for time-active researchers its by-products are available at once. The deep engineers whose task is to penetrate and retrieve items from such dead-time states are commonly known as nechronomancers, and their greatest contribution to the War so far has been the entropic material HEM (Highest Entropy Matter).

Their refusal to accept the existence of time *per se*, their belief in no actual past and no actual future even on the Homeworld, is in itself enough to make them pariahs in House society. By their logic no culture can have precedence in time by virtue of chronology ('we were here first'), something which flies in the face of all House custom, yet they remain an irreplaceable War resource. Bolstered by their beliefs – and actually strengthened by their pariah status, which has led to the expurgation of most of their House histories, including records of their names and genders – the nechronomancers are able to manipulate time states which would be beyond the limits of most navigators and timeship pilots. It's been suggested that their deliberate embracing of the role of the *other* and the *outcaste* may be a far more important factor in their abilities than any philosophical beliefs they might hold. [See also Women (Dressing Up As).]

***RONALD BELA* NEVITZ *(1912 – 1979)* [*Lesser Species: Participant (C20)*]** Scientific theorist, born in Warsaw of mixed western/eastern European parentage but notable for the work he produced (much of it philosophical rather than "hard"-scientific) at Cambridge, England. Though in War terms his assassination overshadowed his life, and to mainstream humanity he's best remembered as the subject of a somewhat over-excitable film biography in 1987, as far as his writings are concerned he's most known for his 1958 book *The Tree of Time*: the work in which he first coined the term "biodata", and attempted to describe its existence as a form of 'time DNA' defining any individual's niche in both the physical universe and the nooscape of history. To understand how biodata works in Nevitz's model it's necessary to think of the universe as what he called a 'topology of comprehension'. According to the standard model of quantum thinking, nothing provably *exists* in the universe. The universe is just a series of probabilities of what may or may not happen, what may or may not be measurable, and no scientific theory can prove that any one of these possibilities is definitively true. Only the presence of a conscious observer can collapse the possibilities, until only one state is at least *seen* to exist. But the Nevitz version goes on to suggest that if things only become actual once an observer is present to give them meaning, then it's strands of meaning which make up the real mass of the universe, not physical matter (a principle which, in the War Era, neatly explains the existence of the conceptual entities).

This means that as an individual moves through the four "common" dimensions – just by, say, living his or her life in an ordinary fashion – he or she leaves a kind of trail through the continuum, a path connecting all the strands of meaning which he or she has made actual. As individuals meet or interact or give birth or die, the strands merge and split, but nonetheless it's theoretically possible to read them and therefore make out the true shape of the individual's life… a shape which bears no relation to the flesh-and-blood form at all.

The book's suggestion is that an individual *is* his or her biodata strand, and that the individual's body, at any single point in his or her existence, is at best a kind of cursor on that strand. The true individual, an enormous mass of collapsed possibilities and trans-temporal information, is invisible

and inconceivable but nonetheless very, very real. In this model of the universe, then, every conscious entity is the size of whole worlds and there's no solid dividing line between one life and the next. (In Nevitz's own era this suggestion bothered many of his critics, as its description of an "intangible greater self" is perilously close to suggesting a spiritual "true self", a literal *soul*. However, in Nevitz's description there's clearly nothing spiritual about it, despite the great ritual significance now attached to biodata by groups like Faction Paradox.)

Nevitz's ultimate conclusion was that if the existence of biodata could be proved, then its impact on human culture would be beyond description. But despite the manner of his death, Nevitz had no real understanding of the War, no idea that its protagonists largely rely on biodata-driven technology and no notion that it had *already* begun to affect human culture. The full story of his assassination has never been told, certainly not by the film adaptation of his life, although events seem to have become muddled simply because of the number of bystanders present rather than because there was any great secret behind it. The killing was engineered by Remote shock troops thought to have been connected to one of the more militant/ritual movements, and carried out in public before a crowd of horrified onlookers. The first emergency medical teams on the scene arrived marginally too late to save Nevitz's life.

From the Remote's point of view, there was a logic behind the assassination. Nevitz was the father of the biodata theory; thanks to his speculations in 1958, several Remote and posthuman groups had developed the doctrine that the nature of human biodata was intrinsically superior to that of the Great Houses [see Time Travel: Biodata Principle]; therefore the death of the father, according to the Remote's own brand of image-reasoning, brought them a kind of redemption. In the same way that the death of any symbolic God-King allows that King's people to prosper[10], the killing of Nevitz may have been an attempt by the Remote to reach a level of self-identity on a par with the Houses themselves.

It's ironic that Nevitz, who throughout his life had achieved very little recognition outside his own circles, would never have imagined that his death might be a result of his long-term impact on the human species. It's doubly ironic that in a sense the Remote's operation was a success, as

Nevitz's on-screen death in the 1987 film *Frozen Moments* (albeit attributed in the script to Soviet assassins) turned him into a far greater popular icon than his book ever had in his own lifetime.

THE NEW YOUNG GODS [Remote: Group (War Era)]

'There's no such thing as harmless entertainment.'
– Mother Festen, Faction Paradox Ritual Wing.

When the Great Houses began the Broken Remote project – with the aim of subverting and neutralising the spontaneous, unpredictable Remote by infiltrating and "banalising" their culture – there were no greater weapons in the Houses' arsenal than the New Young Gods, still perceived as a major achievement in the art of getting a population to re-program *itself*.

Most of the impulses planted in Remote culture by the Houses were designed simply to introduce a crushing, grinding monotony to the Remote's media systems and curb the race's outward-looking impulses, but the New Young Gods project was subtly different. It consisted of a series of ongoing transmissions, following a group of typical Remote citizens (chosen by the Houses according to strict demographic principles) all of whom were placed at the threshold of what the Houses described as 'a great opportunity'. Quite simply, *one* of these subjects would be made a God. This certainly must have seemed possible: in Remote culture celebrities and notabilities are treated as semi-divine entities anyway, and with the backing of the Houses it was easy to believe that this might have been a quite literal kind of Godhood. At the end of the sequence, promised the media, one of the subjects would become the Lord of the New Society. The question was, *which would it be?*

It was an irresistible idea to the mass-mind of the Remote, obsessed as they were with idols and iconography. To follow the progress of one of their own kind from human into divinity… there were unquestionably some who queried why only the most *obedient* were given this shot at deification, but even they seemed to have difficulty resisting the general concept.

But the true genius of the New Young Gods transmissions was this. Although *all* the contenders were equally banal, although *all* of them promised to become exactly the same kind of God if successful and although *all* of them were essentially puppets sworn to follow the Houses' directives no matter what, the ruling Houses had arranged things quite carefully so that out of the two last surviving contenders for Godhood one

was *slightly* more smug, *slightly* more suspicious and *slightly* more over-confident than the other. Naturally the final outcome was decided by the Remote themselves, whose neurosystems immediately responded to their favourite applicant thanks to their fast-access link with the media. And therein lay the brilliance of the project.

When the marginally less unpopular contender ascended to Godhood, there was a massive rush of satisfaction amongst the Remote, overjoyed that the "bad" candidate wouldn't be the one becoming their new Lord. The fact that the "good" candidate was virtually identical to the "bad", and sworn by contract of Godhood to uphold the Houses' programme of cultural degeneration, was unimportant: even those who might have known better, who remembered the principles of the Remote before the Houses' infiltration, were happy to acknowledge that justice had been done. In short, in the space of just a year *the entire Remote colony had been conditioned to accept mediocrity which a decade earlier would have appalled them*.

(It should also be pointed out that some of the colonists still remembered the pre-receiver era, when there'd been such things as organised political parties instead of just trends and images. An unplanned side-effect of the New Young Gods programme was that it conditioned the population to abandon the last remnants of a politicised society. The population was increasingly quite happy to accept that *any* two candidates for *any* post would be identical, apart from minor personality issues, thus eradicating the more democratic fringes from Remote society in one fell swoop.)

Since the project began there have been sixteen Lords of the New Society, another contender being granted Godhood and then ceremonially disembodied every year. So far all the Lords have been virtually identical, but more importantly the Remote colony which tolerated their creation now has no aspirations whatsoever. As Remote reproduction is itself linked to the media via the remembrance tanks, the Broken Remote are born with no ambitions other than to become New Young Gods themselves, becoming not only identical but natural-born servants of the ruling Houses. The Broken Remote have, within a generation, been wiped out of existence as anything other than lumps of passive, homogenised biomass.

Those responsible for maintaining the New Young Gods project still insist that the transmissions are just ‘escapism’, although Mother Festen, the last Faction Paradox dignitary to set foot on the colony, described this careful slaughter of the Remote’s ambition as ‘literally the worst crime ever committed against a race of humanity’. One can learn from the most brutal of massacres, runs the theory, but the New Young Gods – despite the Houses’ constant claims that the project is merely a trivial, insignificant pageant – represent the death of all meaning. Locked in perpetual stasis, and trained to accept empty, vapid lives for all eternity, some of the more active Remote tribes have speculated that the Broken Remote would frankly be better off dead.

***THE* NINE HOMEWORLDS [*Great Houses: Locations (Worlds)*]** *Crypto-forming:* the technique of radically re-sculpting the geography, the ecosystem, even the noosphere of a planet, typically to mislead an enemy. The defences and military installations of the Great Houses can be laced into the topographies of whole worlds, which can then be crypto-formed to hide all traces of their presence. It's suspected that on one occasion House Mirraflex "removed" an intelligent culture which the Houses had previously contacted, re-creating the culture's razed world as an exact duplicate of its former self but without any hint that the Houses had been there.

It was in the last decades before the War that the ruling Houses began talking openly about creating *alternative Homeworlds*. The idea wasn't a new one. It had first been suggested four-hundred years previously, as a method of protecting the seat of the Houses from its enemies, although at that point most of the ruling Houses still refused to accept they had any enemies worth considering. The Nine Homeworlds project was initiated only after the nature of the Houses' War-time enemy started to become clear, a project which would see eight planets within the Spiral Politic removed from normal-time and turned into cloneworlds with the same unusual relationship to history as the original.

But what was the point of this mammoth project? Officially it seems to have been to produce "time capsules" for House society. The cloneworlds (in no way *identical* duplicates, despite the name) were all primed with the Protocols which had been rooted in the soil of the original Homeworld since time immemorial. In theory, should the Homeworld fall then new House society could begin on one of the backups. And yet… although the ruling Houses revealed as little as possible of the project, there seems to have been a suggestion that these other worlds were also decoys, that the enemy might be tricked into attacking them instead of the original. This seems ludicrous, of course. Although all of the Nine Homeworlds now exist outside the timeline of the Spiral Politic, all of them are linked by a real-time analogue to their former locations in history. It seems ridiculous to believe that the enemy wouldn't know where to look for the genuine article (the idea has often been referred to as "Goon Logic" by observers outside the Homeworld).

Unless, of course, the original Homeworld isn't where it used to be. Without question, the Houses possess the "vulgar" technology to physically shift a planet from one part of the continuum to another, although it's always been thought that if they moved the real-time analogue of their *own* world – a world set dead at the heart of history – then the repercussions across the Spiral Politic would be huge. But the Nine Homeworlds project was a huge undertaking, and went ahead under conditions of unusual secrecy. Is it feasible that the Homeworld which now appears to rest at the centre of the Spiral Politic is not, in fact, the original?

Further research is made difficult by the fact that the ruling Houses refuse to let any of their own people visit any of the eight other Homeworlds. They have to remain segregated, goes the argument, to ensure that the cultural data encoded into every particle of atmosphere and every geological layer remains pure. Officially all eight are merely minor colonies, attended by caretaker-Houses who have no impact on the War itself, yet this makes it impossible to guess how these caretaker-Houses see things. Do they *know* that they're nothing more than colonies? Or do they all believe that they're the original, the core-world, and that *the* Homeworld is just a puppet under their own control? The fact that the Nine Homeworlds project was arranged by the monstrously subtle House Lineacrux has certainly led to some speculation.

Today, the Homeworld is under the jurisdiction of the War King and the official centre of all operations against the enemy. It's debatable how the Spiral Politic would react if it found out that each of the Homeworld's eight sisters has a War King or War Queen of its own. And should any of these cloneworlds decide to produce further cloneworlds, then soon the universe could be nothing *but* Homeworlds.

NOOSPHERE [*Great Houses: Terminology*] As defined by palaeontologist/mystic Pierre Teillhard de Chardin, the noosphere is the living interaction of thought and culture, distinguishable from the geosphere (containing all non-living things) and the biosphere (containing the physically living world). The noosphere is the limit set by a species' technology, biology and psychology on the data it can find and the data it can understand. If something seems to exist beyond the noosphere, then the data may be out of reach: it's in this sense that certain dead-time states are considered to be outside any noosphere, even by the Great Houses. Alternatively the data might be *beyond* the scope of the senses, or just beyond comprehension.

As the Houses specifically engineered the Spiral Politic to be an extension of their own will, it could be argued that the whole of the Spiral Politic is the Houses' noosphere. It's hardly surprising that the Homeworld sees itself as the "eye" of history, formerly with the Presidency as its focus, or that many time-aware cultures seriously believe they'll cease to exist if the Houses ever stop perceiving them.

Yet there are clearly non-dead-time areas in the Spiral Politic which the Houses have difficulty penetrating, or even observing, even if it's not clear how these areas got there. Perhaps the recent modifications made by the Houses to their own bodies are desperate attempts to rectify the fault, crossbreeding themselves with other biological systems in the hope of producing a mutation that can "see in the dark" beyond the noosphere's edge. Perhaps it's even true to say that the Houses' War-time enemy comes from beyond the noosphere altogether, not because it comes from another universe (it doesn't) or because it defies the laws of physics (it tries not to) but because it operates on principles that the Houses just aren't built to understand.

NORTH AMERICAN WARRIOR TRIBES (EARLIEST REMOTE TROOPS) [Remote: Group (Earth, C19)]

'What do you know of these things, son of my mother's brother? You see this old woman, this witch who defies the teachings shown to me, me, by the Master of Life? Three days she has been roasting on the fire and yet she lives still. Suffers still. Your fire burns too hot and fast. The screams of your enemies are lost in the clouds, swallowed by crows. The bones of your enemies crumble to ash. Ha! The screams of my one old woman will sing in the skulls of my people for all their days to come!'
- Shawano prophet Tenskwatawa to Cousin Belial, 1806

The ability of the indigenous people of North America to operate independently of (and in some cases with complete *disdain* for) Faction Paradox, despite their fetishistic tendencies and their readiness to accept the Faction's methods, made them ideal experimental Remote subjects. After the first generation of Remote troops had proven to be deeply flawed in open battle, the Faction began scattering small-scale Remote projects throughout the timeline of humanity, and North American groups such as the Paiute, the Kiowa and the Cheyenne were – at least chronologically – the earliest subjects. By involving themselves in the root totem-cultures which produced the first true Remote in the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh centuries, the Faction hoped to better understand the ritualistic side of the human psyche, and there were indeed many obvious parallels between the *loa*-driven Remote and the *dakina*-driven warrior tribes.

Although the Native Americans had a fairly reliable swift communications network established long before the telegraph, in the form of the peyote dream runners, what caught the attention of Faction-Paradox was their fondness for grisly ceremonial self-mutilation (as in the case of Catch-the-Bear's War Bonnet); the practice of prolonged ritualised torture, in which the screams of the victims induced a communal altered state of consciousness; the use of skeletal fragments as totems; and, most importantly, the tribes' particular genius in adapting the technologies brought by colonial invaders for both practical and ritual applications, especially with regard to weapons.

As soon as a native warrior took the flintlocks from a dead man's hands, experimentation and modifications began. By the latter half of the nineteenth century rifle barrels were routinely shortened, insignia and decor were stripped from the stocks to make them lighter, and anything which jangled or made noise was considered a detriment. (Some of these modifications were in fact later used by US cavalry troops serving in the Indian Wars.) Aiming sights were removed without fail, as these were believed to interfere with the spiritual connection between the eye of the hunter/warrior and the heart of his prey/target. Considered living extensions of the bearer, these weapons were also given naming ceremonies and carried their own personal totems into battle, most notably in the case of the Screaming Skull rifle A'daltem Ano'nde.

If Faction Paradox learned little from its operations in North America, then its failure was purely a result of extenuating circumstances. At this point in the War various crises resulted in the Faction losing track of many of its Remote projects. However, the Nunaha'wu of the Arapaho Indians is evidence that either the Faction had a great impact on many of the nineteenth century tribes, or that the warriors and the Faction did indeed have a great deal in common to begin with.

***THE* NORTH LOS ANGELES CABAL [*Faction Paradox: Group (Earth, C20)*]** The original name, if there ever was such a thing, of the former Faction Paradox cell now known by the more business-friendly title Faction Hollywood. Although the group is generally associated with the excesses of the modern entertainment industry, the Faction's cabal in California pre-dates the founding of the studio system and its connection to Hollywood came about almost by accident.

A link between cinematography and ritual was established as early as Eisenstein's silent epic *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) which, though not the first fully-developed "motion picture", was certainly the first to use the medium as a ritual focus. A celebration of the Revolutionary spirit, its rapid visual rhythm designed to match the pulse of early twentieth century history, *Potemkin's* purpose was to provide a ceremonial spectacle for its Russian audience as if it were a kind of modern-day Mystery of the Saints. (By contrast, America's earlier *Birth of a Nation* – a eulogy to the Ku Klux Klan, with its robed, hooded, almost priest-like "heroes" – was a devotion to the older, buried forces which had fed the country's slave-culture, a supplication to America's hidden Lords and Masters rather than a communion of the people.) There was no conscious decision by Faction Paradox to take an interest in the new medium of cinema, but *Battleship Potemkin* seemed almost determined to make a connection with the higher ceremonies of the Spiral Politic. Patronage inevitably came from the Faction rather than any other House, with its history of revolt and its own ties to the Russian Revolution thanks to the Thirteen-Day Republic.

Nonetheless it was in America, not Russia, that the Faction took root. This wasn't simply because Hollywood was destined to become the heart of the cinema business. The truth is that the *real* body of Faction Paradox had very little to do with American operations even in the early days: the Eleven-Day Empire had far bigger projects in mind, and the agents who arrived in '20s California had little or no firsthand experience of the War-time powers. They were second- or third-generation agents, descendants of those recruits who'd been posted on the American continent throughout the nineteenth century. Though the majority of these bloodlines were survivors of the North American warrior tribes, now more Remote than Faction, the recruits who'd overseen the events of the 1800s from the safety

of the colonial armies had passed on both the lore and the technology to their offspring. So when the deserts of the west slowly gave way to the pleasure-gardens of Los Angeles, they more than anyone could understand the gateways into new worlds being created around them.

For this reason the early LA cabal was little more than a gentleman's club, a private party within an industry still coming to terms with the impact of talking pictures, often exchanging notes with other members-only societies like the Order of the White Peacock and the fashionable *art nouveau* groups which had been practising Egyptian-flavoured mysticism since the end of World War One. After the vast Egyptian set for *The Ten Commandments* was buried – intact – beneath the Los Angeles desert, these dilettantes hailed it as a "lost city" for the modern world, a new Valley of the Kings for the new Empire of the West Coast. Society parties were frequently held on the site. It's doubtful that any of the group's movements were monitored by the Eleven-Day Empire itself, although the cabal was on at least one occasion successful in summoning one of the Godfathers of the Eleven-Day Empire to California, resplendent in full battle armour.

John Selzner captured him on film in 1930: the raw footage, scorched and blurred but by no means indecipherable, suggests the melodrama of a silent movie rather than the veracity of a newsreel. It was always the way of things, with the Los Angeles cell. Yet compared to the later and more monumental works of Faction Hollywood it seems almost touching and naive.

NUNAHA'WU [*Remote: Group (Earth, C79)*] Although the literal meaning of *Nunaha'wa* is lost to modern human scholars, the rough translation of the phrase implies both the singular present tense 'I am not existing' and also the plural past tense 'we were not here'. This was the seventh degree in Arapaho warrior society, a secret order whose ceremonies were witnessed only by the group itself. They had no ritual dance, as did the lower orders of the North American warrior tribes; no weapons; no badges of honour. They didn't fight, but accompanied war parties and performed ceremonies and prayers for their success in "bone lodges" which supposedly rendered the occupants invisible to (and unheard by) friend and foe alike.

Even the eighth and highest order of Arapaho warriors – the seven venerable "Grandfathers", who instructed all the other orders – knew nothing of the rituals performed by the Nunaha'wu. No member of the tribe knew how members were called to serve, and the identities of those individuals were ceremonially excised from tribal histories in a Rubbing Ceremony prior to initiation. This ceremony involved drawing the sigils representing the individual's name or names in wet clay, then pouring water over the clay until the impressions were erased while family members sang them out of existence by omitting their names from the family's repertoire. (The Arapaho language is aesthetically precise, and very rhythmic. Any omission in the cadence of a song was intolerable to them. An unmeaning exclamation such as *e'yahe'eye* or *he'e'e* would be inserted to maintain the natural rhythm and flow of the piece so that by the ceremony's end, in songs and symbols at least, the individual no longer existed.)

For all this, it's still possible that the order of Nunaha'wu was a figurative representation of Faction Paradox itself and existed purely as metaphor. The similarity between the symbolic "rubbing out" ceremony and the (supposed) retirement from history of Grandfather Paradox is so striking that it's often been described as an elaborate joke, though if so then it may well be a joke on the Arapaho's part rather than the Faction's. There's also a marked similarity between the song-patterns used by the Nun'aha'wu and the rhythmic codes used by the Faction to subvert the open door portals of the Great Houses, but as Arapaho language pre-dates the use of

the doors it's likely that Faction Paradox simply gave the tribes some understanding of the doors' operating procedures in a form they could appreciate.

***COUSIN* OCTAVIA [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Present)*]** Faction Paradox recruit, born in late-Victorian Scotland as the eighth daughter of an eighth daughter, and the Cousin responsible for the fall of the rogue Thirteen-Day Republic.

As a child she would sometimes suffer spasms, speaking in a nonsense-language with her eyes rolling back in her head. Her mother, seeing the potential in this, advertised Octavia as a mystic seer and took her around the country to talks by various arcane sects and groups. She was at one point denounced as a fraud by Madame Blavatsky (although Blavatsky may have been protecting her business interests in denying a younger, far more attractive psychic). At some stage in the endless round of seances and scientific tests Octavia was recruited into Faction Paradox, and it was in the Faction's training that her real gifts were revealed.

She was an adept learner, soon initiated and bound with the shadow of a rapier as part of her *sombras que corta* ritual. Her genuine but limited precognitive power – her witchblood – was channelled into battle strategy, where her instincts gave her an edge against more experienced fighters. She became one of the elite, taking part in several major battles and fighting side-by-side with then-Cousin Anastasia during the Second Wave crusades. How close the two women were at this time has never been confirmed, although both women came from cultures in which having a *pash* for another woman was considered acceptable.

Always studious, Octavia was more interested in pushing her skills than in her status and wasn't tempted when Anastasia formed the breakaway Thirteen-Day Republic despite her old friend's offer of an army to command. Instead she withdrew into the depths of the Stacks, working on new strategies of subterfuge and training a cadre of fellow precognitives in her own form of martial art. When Faction Paradox finally passed the resolution to attack the upstart Republic, it was Octavia who came forward and asked to lead the attack. She knew Anastasia's weaknesses, having sparred with her and fought by her side, and could see the flaws in the Republic's defences. The House agreed, since it would also give them a chance to evaluate the new tactics which Octavia had been promoting but which had yet to be seen in action. In actual fact Octavia's plan had very

little to do with precognition, and involved cloaking her own troops as members of the Republic's unstable guard, the Red Burial.

Octavia attacked on Valentine's Day: a day known for its murders and massacres as well as for lovers' trysts. After the success of her assault on Anastasia's realm, the practice of launching major attacks on significant dates was adopted by Faction Paradox almost by default and has greatly increased their chances of victory ever since. Octavia herself oversaw the fate of Anastasia and then returned to the Stacks 'to work on a few ideas'. She hasn't been seen in public since.

OPEN DOORS [*Great Houses: Technology (Earth, C19)*] Timed to coincide with primitive occult portents such as solar eclipses, these were the "eyes" or "portals" through which the Great Houses delivered pre-recorded messages to the North American warrior tribes, largely messages of salvation and freedom from European encroachment. Simple interactive projections, designed to tap into iconography specific to the recipient's regional culture, the accompanying images included a standard speech from God and a guided tour of the Heaven-on-Earth (including reunions with dead loved ones) promised if local tribes rejected the technological wonders of the white man's war machines. It was in the Houses' interests to do this: a rejection of the American settlers' technology also meant a rejection of the techno-fetishism being promoted by Faction Paradox.

At the same time the Faction's agents were managing to slip their own messages through these open doors, complete with "hacking" rituals which would raise multitudes of the happy dead as heavily-armed ghost armies to aid in the war against white invaders. It's possible that the vast spectral war-party led by Pai'ngya in 1877 was one of these cultural constructs.

ORDER OF THE DRAGON [*Lesser Species: Group (Earth, C15)*] Secretive Christian order of knighthood, founded in the early fifteenth century by the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Hungary and known for its obsession with pre-human cultures. Accepted history maintains that the Order was founded to protect the Eastern European lands between the Danube and the Black Sea from the Ottoman Turks, and that it was exclusively dedicated to defeating the Islamic movements then advancing on Constantinople (at that time the bulkhead of Christianity between Europe and the Muslim world). However, it's unlikely that a *covert* warrior-order would have been necessary for this: hostility against the Turks was hardly something the *voivode*-princes of Eastern Europe felt they had to hide. Given that the Order of the Dragon was a cabal of knights with very little subtlety whose members led armies of thousands against Islam even before the Order was founded, it seems unlikely that the organisation was kept hidden to conceal its activities against the Turkish Sultans.

Although it's difficult to gauge the exact nature of the connection, it's known that right up until the eighteenth century the Holy Roman Emperors had links to the Society of St. George, another order of knights which had been aware of the Mal'akh's presence in the Middle East since the crusades and which had long attempted to form a coherent army of soldiers, spies and scholars to prevent the taint of the Mal'akh moving westwards into Europe. The Order of the Dragon undoubtedly possessed a reliquary of artefacts which predated the crusades, whose ritual importance had more than a little in common with the other anti-Mal'akh groups of the era, including a preserved severed head said to have travelled from the lakeshores of Africa 'before the Fall [of Eden?]'. The Order's emblem was a dragon suspended from a crucifix, more than suggestive of the St. George legend. And as the first recorded European sightings of the Mal'akh occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it seems more than likely that while the rank-and-file armies of Eastern Europe fought the Turks in the open the Order was a more exclusive group concerned with exterminating any Mal'akh which might be swept along with the Turkish armies.

(There are indeed accounts, even in the more impartial records, of certain warriors of the Turkish Ottoman Empire who possessed what the defending Christians considered to be an unnatural level of personal magnetism… though curiously, none of these warriors seemed to belong to the officer class. While European propaganda portrays the Turks as monstrous animals, these rare few are often described as having remarkable grace or beauty, some of them possessing eggshell-pale skins which led many to the conclusion that the Turks were using western mercenaries. Inhuman magnetism is, at least according to the *Liber Sanguisugarum*, a common trait of the less degenerate Mal'akh. But whatever the Order's propaganda might claim, it's doubtful the Ottoman Sultans had the slightest idea that the "tainted" might be operating within their ranks.)

The Order's so-called Ottoman Purges continued until around 1447, when the death of the group's most crucial member Prince Vlad II – not to be confused with the *next* Prince Vlad, "the Impaler" – marked an end to the days of the great crusade. The Order ceased to have any real purpose after this date, although its philosophy and pre-human relics began to make their way west, certainly influencing its fellow Society in western Europe over the next few centuries.

ORDER OF THE IRON SOUL [*Lesser Species: Group (City of the Saved)*]
Name used by a resurrected human faction within the City of the Saved. The Order is composed of many of those members of the human races who underwent conversion into cybernetic/human hybrids, and who've been resurrected as such within the City (this seems not to be automatic, and depends perhaps upon the preferences of the individual). A pseudo-religious group, the Order's principles include a martial discipline and an assertion of the superiority of machine life: many, but not all, of those citizens who choose to join were forcibly converted by the Spiral Politic's more aggressive machine cultures. Members of the Order are used as remote agents by the Rump Parliament on the rare occasions when the Parliament needs to act in force.

This unusual alliance has led to speculation among those most confused and breakdown-prone of academics, historians specialising in Faction Paradox, that a resurrected Cousin Pinocchio may be one of the driving forces behind the Order and perhaps behind the Parliament itself.

ORDER OF THE WEAL [Great Houses: Group (Pre-War Era)]

'We don't have a history. We have a mythology. Our past is full of gods and monsters rather than people. Excrement. It's all excrement.'

– Chatelaine Thessalia, The Little Book of Absolute Power.

The Weal, if it's remembered at all, is remembered as an also-ran. History records it as a footnote, one of the many cults which flourished on the Homeworld in the millennium building up to the War, only to be eclipsed by the rise of House Paradox and then by the Faction itself. It's ironic that such a ruthlessly rationalist organisation should be remembered as another half-baked assemblage of invented rites and lore, doubly ironic given the measures it took to ensure that its activities remained covert and anonymous.

The Weal was founded during the brief period, some nine centuries before start of the War, when the traditional powerbase of the Houses was under threat from the *realpolitik* which eventually resulted in the murderous, cataclysmic Imperator Presidency. It's virtually certain, though firm evidence remains tantalisingly out of reach, that the Imperator himself created the Order ten years before he assumed the Presidency. His public concern seems to have been the tendency of the ruling Houses towards degeneracy and fits of quiet megalomania, which, he argued, wasn't as harmless as most of the quiet, degenerate megalomaniacs in the ruling Houses claimed: it actually damaged and weakened the common-weal (the *common good*) of the Houses themselves. Secretly he may also have anticipated the rise of the intervention movement, and the emergence of a new cadre of runaways, renegades and exiles from the Houses' ranks. The Order of the Weal was thus designed as an instrument of state power. It wasn't aligned to any of the existing Houses, nor was its existence revealed to the academicians. It was, in short, the Homeworld's first and only counter-intelligence service. And it developed the Imperator's *realpolitik* posturing into a pure, nihilist philosophy.

The Order's first major operational success was to expose the Imperator as a fanatic and discredit him in the eyes of the ruling Houses. The Imperator may have been disappointed, but he can't have been surprised. Even if

counter-intelligence was a vital part of his aggressive *new* society, he must surely have realised that a group dedicated to the common good of the Homeworld was likely to find his own ambitions unacceptable. Even so the Order continued to revere him as its founder for the next half-millennium. Its Chatelaine might have regretted the Imperator's execution, although she played no part in it: for her, the Weal's philosophy was embodied by the maxim 'let's wind it up and see where it goes'.

There are three major sources on the Order of the Weal, all potentially suspect. Firstly, there are eyewitness accounts originating among the posthuman sects, mainly dealing with events surrounding the eventual destruction of the Order some four-hundred years before the War. Secondly, there's the testimony of former Weal agents subsequently recruited by groups like Faction Paradox. Thirdly, there are the personal notes of the Order's first (and only truly effective) Chatelaine, Chatelaine Thessalia, posthumously and selectively published as *The Little Book of Absolute Power*.

[[▲ Chatelaine Thessalia, former head of the ORDER OF THE WEAL.]]

The Order continued to operate after the Chatelaine's death, almost half a millennium after its founding, but less effectively with a series of caretaker

directors in charge. Organisational inertia kept the Order's base of operations at House Ixion running, although its functions and members were gradually subsumed by the other intervention groups. The network of agents and contacts which the Chatelaine had built up were now inaccessible and fragmented. The Order itself ceased to operate during the century leading up to Grandfather Paradox's release from prison, by which point War-anxiety had already begun to build and the Homeworld had undergone a vast cultural shift.

History had overtaken it. Suddenly the entire Homeworld was living out the Imperator's legacy, and by the end its few surviving idealists were welcomed to the ranks of the newly-formed Faction Paradox.

ORDER OF THE WHITE PEACOCK [*Lesser Species: Group (Earth, C19-20)*]

'The Yezidi are not in the traditional sense "devil" worshippers, even though they worship Satan, yet paradoxically there exists amongst them a hidden inner cult that they would themselves regard as what we would term "satanic" in the sense of evil. It is this group that Empson translates as "the Order of the White Peacock" and I share his belief that it does not originate in Kurdistan, but in China, in the Mountains of the Sung Plateau [...] to the Yezidi, Satan is a heroic warleader in rebellion against a sullen, overreaching, stupid demiurge. It is this demiurge who is revered specifically by the cult of the white, or leprous, peacock, a bleached parody of the multihued vitality of the Yezidi's own Peacock Angel symbolism...'
– From The Cult Of The Peacock Angel: A Short Account Of The Yezidi Tribes of Kurdistan by R. W. H. Empson, with commentary by Sir Richard Carnac Temple.

Sir Richard Carnac Temple (1850 – 1931) had served as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Indian Army as Cantonment Magistrate in the Punjab, Assistant Commissioner of Burma and Superintendent of the Penal Settlement at Port Blair. In this latter posting he became the recognised authority on the Andoman islanders (it was from his accounts that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle drew the description of the islanders cited by Sherlock Holmes in "The Sign Of the Four", and Temple also co-authored the definitive work on their language). He was a brave and by all accounts intelligent man, a member of most of the leading rational societies, yet he swore until the end of his days that during his time in the east he'd seen something both grand and terrible masked under the symbolism of the White Peacock.

Once known, the Order rapidly infected the popular literature of the west. In "The Devil Doctor" (1914-15) by Sax Rohmer, Fu Manchu – the definitive personification of the Yellow Peril – is briefly frustrated when a white peacock, with which he's being presented by a mysterious and important figure from China, is removed by Sir Denis Nayland Smith (a character largely based on Temple himself). Like many of the great powers of the War Era, the Order of the White Peacock had taken a step out of actuality.

As early as the 1890s it had begun the slow process of propagating itself via fiction, recognising the missionaries, the army officers, and especially the writers moving through its domains as a way of taking their beliefs into the west and drawing converts back to the Orient. It may be reasonable to suggest that the membership of the Order itself was irrelevant, that there was no real line of descent between generations of acolytes, and that it was the *aesthetic* of the Order which mattered above all else.

Robert W. Chambers's book *The Slayer of Souls* (1920) was considered the nadir of his fiction by later critics because of its premise that 'anarchists, terrorists, Bolshevists, reds of all shades and degrees, are now believed to represent in modern times the descendants of the devil worshipping Yezidi sect of inner Asia'. As a political thesis this is self-evidently the view of a bigot or a lunatic, but Chambers was nevertheless right to pick up on the popular hysteria. The Order of the White Peacock deliberately provided the material which made its evolution into the Yellow Peril, and into the Red Menace, an irresistible subject for writers. The Order made itself flamboyant, silk-clad, long-finger-nailed and sneering, not because its members were scheming Chinese heathens (although some of them were) or revolutionaries (although some of them were), but because there's a great and occult power in being a peril, a menace, or just an *enemy*. In effect the Oriental front of the later Cold War wasn't a struggle between the West and the East but between the West and the Order, a battle against the all-encompassing fiction which the Order had become, regardless of whether it had any genuine members left by the 1950s. In this respect it might be seen as a small-scale model of the War in the Spiral Politic itself.

By the time of Hollywood's pre-WWll zenith, the symbols of evil in popular film were derived from the totems of the White Peacock at least as much as they were from the Transylvania of the vampire. It can't have hurt that the Order was known to have links with the North Los Angeles cabal not far from Hollywood itself, and was said to have first suggested the idea of a literal Production Hell, an inescapable Chinese puzzle on a Hollywood sound-stage. It was from the archetypes of the Order that the Ming the Merciless emerged, not to mention the pulp/serial villains Shiraz Khan, the Yellow Claw and the Scourge (whose face, tellingly, remained perpetually hidden behind a silk veil). When Sir Richard Carnac Temple had testified to finding something grand and terrible behind the Order's

mask, perhaps he wasn't referring to some ancient inhuman horror or devious oriental master-plan, as later writers liked to imagine. Perhaps what he *really* experienced was the same kind of shock and terror that a character in a short story might feel, if he were suddenly and unexpectedly exposed to the plot of a full-length novel.

ORDIFICA [*Remote: Location (World)*] A world – at least originally – situated roughly halfway between the core "defensive" worlds which surround the Great Houses, and the chain of human/posthuman settlements which have become the breeding-grounds of the Remote. (Naturally, as with all worlds in the Spiral Politic, the location of Ordifica given here describes its place in the structure of history rather than its actual physical *being*.) Originally a small, media-dependent human colony, its surface more than 95% ocean and its numerous island-states relying on a fast-access media system for support and survival, Ordifica is today remembered for being the world where Faction Paradox founded the entire Remote project. The very first proto-Remote troops were bred there, and as a result Ordifica eventually became the first human-occupied world to be entirely wiped from existence by the genocidal Second Wave of the House Military.

Destroying worlds is easy: making sure they stay destroyed, in a War where temporal confusion often leads to battles being replayed to the point of insanity, is harder. It's a measure of the Second Wave's zeal that the method they chose to eradicate Ordifica has since been officially condemned even by the War-time ruling Houses. The strategy didn't simply destroy the world but punched a world-sized hole in the framework of the Spiral Politic itself, a gap in history, a breach in the continuum which neatly ensured that there was no way of re-writing this final, terminal version of events. Time-travel can change the history books, but at the site of Ordifica there's no longer any "paper" on which history can be written.

It's doubtful that it was the mass slaughter of the planet's human and animal population which bothered the Houses. They must have had other worries. History had only been punctured in this way once before, at the very beginning of their culture, and it had led to the first contact with the Yssgaroth. The notion that the Yssgaroth might emerge *again*, via the Ordifica hole, must have been startling. Steps were quickly taken to seal off this potential point of entry, though the technique had to be chosen carefully. A simple time-loop has possible points of egress; a stasis-field is precarious at best. Instead the Houses chose to *enshell* (or *encyst*) Ordifica with HEM, the Highest Entropy Matter.

The space surrounding Ordifica was draped in layer upon layer of HEM, the substance pinning and pressing back native time to the point where it would now require a near-infinite energy source simply to bring the area to a state of absolute stasis. Of course, if Ordifica really *does* represent a possible access-point for the Yssgaroth (and this is by no means certain) then the sealing of the hole can't be any consolation to those human colonists who might have been torn through it and into the Yssgaroth's own alleged under-history. It's easy to be glib about interdimensional "hells", but the truth is that the Yssgaroth were known to specialise in torture, and could string out an animal's nervous system over agonising kilometres without allowing it to die. The thought that anyone might be *kept* by them is truly appalling.

From the outside, a shelled world resembles a planet only superficially. While the surface itself isn't a photon trap in the manner of a black hole, it emits none of its own trapped energy and reflects roughly thirty percent of any outside energy which reaches it (the remainder being dispersed by the laws of nature in an attempt to raise the HEM surface temperature towards absolute zero). Such a surface is therefore dull, grey-to-black and smoothed out beneath the multiplicity of layers. A Faction Paradox observer, one of the few to successfully leave Ordifica before the shelling, remarked: 'They turned it into a giant mothball. They mothballed the whole world.'

It's been suggested that the latest mission of Robert Scarratt has taken his group to Ordifica, although informed House sources insist there's nothing to see at the site and claim Scarratt's mission only involves research into intercreationals on worlds which just happen to be in Ordifica's causal neighbourhood. Then again, Scarratt's House has always been notorious for its investigations into taboo biology. The idea that he might have been sent in the direction of the Yssgaroth is perhaps cause for concern.

***THE* OTTOMAN PURGES *(1431 – 1447)* [*Lesser Species: Event (Earth, C18)*]** A series of bloody assaults against the Ottoman Turks, carried out by the Christian armies of Eastern Europe and orchestrated by the Order of the Dragon. War Era historians have often speculated that while the majority of Europeans believed themselves to be fighting the threat of Islam, the Order's purpose was to wipe out the Mal'akh contagion being swept into Europe along with the Turkish hordes, but perhaps this misses the point. Warrior-knights like those of the Order saw all Muslims as disciples of Satan. To the Order, the Mal'akh were nothing less than the living essence of the Diabolical Foreigner. The Order pledged itself to eradicating "the few" who had direct contact with the Mal'akh devils, while lesser armies set about slaughtering "the many" who were simply ungodly[11].

One of the most enthusiastic members of the Order was Vlad II, later *voivode*-prince of Wallachia, whose recruitment to the society in the early 1430s might be considered somewhat surprising: an ambitious warrior-noble and politician, known to have gained his throne through a complex series of assassinations and to have slaughtered his opponents' whole families, might not seem a prime candidate for a *Christian* Order. But though Vlad's armies may have been responsible for the murders of men, women and children, the Order's chiefs must have acknowledged that a lot of them were at least *heathen* men, women and children.

Yet in the final analysis, Vlad II was too ambitious, and too much the politician, to satisfy his masters in the Order. Once installed on the throne of Wallachia he attempted to walk an uneasy middle-ground between the Christians to the west and the Ottomans to the east, possibly telling the Order that only by maintaining some form of equilibrium could the real threat of contamination from Constantinople be rooted out. But the Order was hardly going to approve of such a diplomatic approach, especially after the Turks massacred Hungary's great crusading army in 1444. The Order arranged the assassination of Vlad II soon afterwards. He was buried alive, a standard remedy for warriors of the Order who were believed to have become touched by the corruptive blood (i.e. biomass) of the Mal'akh: it was notoriously difficult to tell when a Mal'akh or Mal'akh servant was

actually dead, so leaving them to mummify in the earth was standard practice.

There's no evidence that Vlad really *was* contaminated, of course. This was simply the Order's way of explaining that it felt betrayed. A man who tried to mollify the Sultans of Islam was, in their eyes, little better than a monster.

Brought up in a warzone where the burning and mass execution of entire villages was common practice, Vlad's son Vlad III was initiated into the Christian mysteries as a child but never rose to lead the Order. Rather, he *became* the Order, taking on his father's mantle and regalia before brutally skewering his predecessor's assassins – or anybody vaguely suspected of being in league with them – and leaving them to die on sharpened poles, specially prepared for the purpose. This was, famously, a particular fetish for the younger Vlad. Unquestionably he knew about the Mal'akh, having been primed by his father and schooled by an elderly veteran of the wars against the Mal'akh-infiltrated armies at Nicolopolis, and it's tempting to claim that his practice of leaving both enemies and criminals to slowly die on stakes was a misguided attempt to carry on the Order's work. Even if a Mal'akh won't immediately be destroyed when hung on a spit which pierces its entire body, the method certainly neutralises the threat.

But the truth is, it's far more likely that Vlad inflicted this punishment on his victims simply because he was clinically sadistic. At Brasov in 1459, 30,000 people were murdered in this fashion on St. Bartholomew's Day, one of many such mass executions which often involved the culling of men, women and children alike. The useless – the old men and the infants – were put to the spike when convenient, mothers and their young often run through the abdomen on a single stake (indeed, unfaithful women were frequently skinned and sexually mutilated in addition to being spiked). If the young prince *had* learned the technique as a result of the Order's teachings, then he must have taken to it with a great deal of relish [but see also under Sacrifice].

The Ottoman Purges were over. The war between east and west quite definitely wasn't.

PAI'NGYA ***("STANDS-IN-THE-MIDDLE", 1549 – 1900)*** **[*Remote*: *Participant (Earth, C19)*]** War prophet of the North American Kiowa tribe, and wielder of the A'daltem Ano'nde, the "Screaming Skull" rifle said to be the *true* leader of the Kiowa forces (with Pai'ngya, the human focus, being a mere extension of the weapon's function). From October of 1876 through January of 1879, with Pai'ngya/Screaming Skull leading the raiding parties, the Kiowa had no less than fifteen successful campaigns against territorial incursion from white settlers throughout Oklahoma and Texas. One of the few white survivors, Mrs. George (Nancy Sims) Wilhauer, was seven years old when Pai'ngya's war party attacked her family's wagon train near Red Clay Ridge in September 1877. She claimed that many of his warriors were apparitions. Her detailed – if rather frenetic – written account appears in Sazali Sabudin's biography of *Pai'ngya Stands-in-the-Middle: Cunning Mesmerist or Holy Warrior?* (1972):

'I was hiding behind the left forward wheel of our wagon when I became aware of a sensation of pressure inside my head and rumbling in the ground beneath my feet then came a cracking noise and a sort of wailing like the sounds of wind and thunder being imitated by human voices. As I peered out between the spokes I saw all manner of Indians rising up out of the earth dressed in full regalia some with their mounts beneath them and all were a greyish white in colour like clouds. Yet I could make out the details of their clothing the decorations on their quirts and bows even the markings upon their ponies. One of them emerged from the ground right next to the wagon. He was dressed in the hide of a mountain lion with its head upon his own like a hood though as I said no colour to any of it.

'He smiled at me and poked his quirt through the spokes touching my forehead between my eyes. He then rode off to join with the others. I followed his progress and saw their chief who appeared to be a flesh and blood man fire his rifle into the air. From out of the barrel came a black devil. As it emerged it took on more definition and I could see it was wearing a flowing black gown and rather than a head such as our own it had the skull of some strange animal quite large. It grew and grew out of the barrel of the gun like a genie from a bottle until it filled the sky above the encampment. It spread its arms wide. The jaw of the skull fell open and it screamed. Oh such a sound as if the very ether had been torn!

‘I must have fainted then as I remember little else of the battle save that when I came to my senses again the Indians were no longer about. Our wagons were still burning and the oxen and mules had been butchered. They had stolen the horses of course. All the members of our party were dead their bodies burned or mutilated.’

Most scholars dismiss much of her account, assuming the more fanciful aspects to stem from trauma, which events at Red Clay Ridge would undoubtedly have caused to a small child. But there can be no doubt that Pai’ngya and his warriors left her alive in order to recount exactly what she witnessed on that day. Young Nancy’s story was picked up by newspapers all over the US, and must certainly have contributed to the drop in westward excursions of hopeful settlers and entrepreneurs out of St. Louis over the next two years.

Though there was no known direct connection between Pai’ngya and Cousin Belial, Faction Paradox’s ground-level operator in North America, the 1877 attack bears all the hallmarks of a Remote raid. In the same way that the Faction’s agents in post-industrial cultures would “hack into” the media systems of human subjects, it seems likely that by this point the Faction had already infiltrated the “media” of the North American tribes (through rituals like that of the peyote dream runners). Faction Paradox had nothing against the colonial settlers in America, of course: from its point of view, it was simply allowing its early Remote troops to unlock their full potential.

PARABLOX [Lesser Species: Technology]

'There's no way I can take this time-spiral apart without using my teeth.'

- Traditional.

Children's toy, marketed in certain western European states shortly before Christmas 1987, although by the end of the Christmas period all remaining stock had been erased from the shelves thanks to the intervention of the Great Houses.

As no War Era faction seems to have had a reason to create or distribute it, it's generally thought that Parablox "grew into" twentieth-century culture, filling a niche in the market which was *inevitably* going to exist in a world where so many Great House, Remote and Faction Paradox groups had become part of the environment.

Every packet of Parablox contained a number of multicoloured interlocking bricks, each one moulded from a plastic polymer and threaded with a minimum-lode biodata stream, making the blocks *aware* but not actually intelligent. Parablox models were generally four-dimensional metastructures, although their efficiency varied according to their aesthetic elegance. The smallest set, consisting of only 35 pieces, could be assembled into a pocket-sized naked singularity: the largest ostensibly contained enough pieces to build an entire bubble universe, but as a great deal of Parablox stock was still unsold when the toy was excised (there was no advertising campaign, and no apparent drive to make the product fashionable) few of these expensive *Universe-in-a-Cardboard-Box* sets would actually have been sold. A short-lived website accompanied the toy's release, where plans could be found for a working Parablox black hole, yet it's doubtful that any purchaser ever acquired enough black bricks to complete the design. Although, as the website pointed out, light vanishes beyond the event horizon anyway and the amateur builder could get away with using blue bricks inside the Schwartzchild radius without anybody ever noticing.

Parablox was clearly a trivial amusement, a minor techno-cultural glitch in the timeline. But in fairness, it should be pointed out that those children

who *did* receive sets for Christmas 1998 stood a far better chance of developing time-awareness skills, not to mention more straightforward spatial awareness skills, in later life. It's thus possible that it may be one of the few truly positive things to emerge during the War Era.

It should also be noted that despite the product's name it was impossible to build any kind of temporal paradox with the bricks, as the structure would inevitably fall to pieces before it could be completed. It's chillingly easy to imagine the elders of Faction Paradox playing with the surviving Parablox sets behind closed doors, and being constantly irritated by the failure of their designs to stay upright.

***HOUSE* PARADOX [*Faction Paradox: House (Pre-War Era)*]** Original designation of Faction Paradox, in the days when it was accepted as one of the Great Houses rather than the political-criminal organisation it is today.

Founded around four-hundred years prior to the outbreak of the War, the House was seen as a disturbing development even before its founder began speaking out in favour of alternative time structures and implying (alarmingly) that change was in itself the most important tool of any culture. Under the Protocols, any member of one of the Oldblood Houses maintained the right to renounce the protection of his or her own bloodline and become the head of a new bloodline at a new chapterhouse. However, this hadn't actually been done in living memory. It was thought that there was simply no *need* for any more Houses. To begin a new "family" smacked of biodiversity, and the founder's decision to take on the title of "Grandfather" was seen as nothing short of tasteless.

Certainly, in the early days of House Paradox the Homeworld responded to this alarming new bloodline by ignoring it altogether, having dismally failed to reign the Grandfather in at an Audience of the ruling Houses. Even when the Grandfather arranged the construction of the Eleven-Day Empire, the usual rules of Homeworld society just didn't seem sufficient to deal with the situation. It's telling that when the other Houses finally *did* arrest and imprison the Grandfather, they did so only after a series of domestic crises on the Homeworld as the consequences of the Imperator Presidency caught up with them: the same mood of change which had created House Paradox now demanded that the other Houses *do* something about it. House Paradox hadn't yet created its first batch of offspring, and the Houses must have hoped that by removing its founder they'd be putting an end to the bloodline while it only had a few "cuckoo" members. They at least had the wit to realise that if they'd *executed* the Grandfather, then House Paradox's death-fetishism would have seemed justified and the House might even have gained new support.

But with the War bearing down on them and the intervention groups screaming for more and more blood, the status quo of the ruling Houses continued to fall apart. By the time the Grandfather finally escaped (or, perhaps more accurately, was freed) from imprisonment 241 years later, it

was just one of many, many crises for a Homeworld which now felt permanently under siege. Yet even then, nobody expected the Grandfather to become *quite* such a significant figure, and nobody expected House Paradox to give up every House privilege by redefining itself as a *Faction*.

House Paradox's story ends there. With the Grandfather's bloodline no longer holding House status or enjoying the protection of the Protocols, the ruling Houses quickly outlawed the group, although as the death penalty was hardly an option it's not clear what they were planning to do to anyone found guilty of belonging to it. Nevertheless the Faction's members became exiles from the Homeworld, and over the next few decades rebuilt the family as the non-linear guerrilla organisation it is today, with a policy of recruitment which now extends far beyond the gene-pools of the Homeworld. Grandfather Paradox, on the other hand, chose to retire from history altogether.

The Grandfather now never existed, and has been in a state of never-having-existed for two-hundred years. The Speaker's Seat is still kept free in the Eleven-Day Empire, although nobody seriously expects the founder to return. Faction Paradox may rely on myths, but it doesn't take them *that* seriously.

PARADOX ANXIETY [*Great Houses: Terminology*] The existence of Faction Paradox, of an errant House which believes in embracing every principle rejected by the rest of the Homeworld, has had a more profound psychological effect on the other Great Houses than most observers imagine. There's always been a deep-rooted fear among time-aware cultures that the use of time-technology might trigger some form of paradox, but the Faction gives this fear a very real face. Under current conditions, when a House agent stands on the verge of creating a paradox it's impossible to think of it as a natural, if regrettable, hazard: it now becomes something *wilful*, something *antagonistic*, as if somebody is always waiting on the sidelines to corrupt his or her very essence as soon as he or she makes one tiny mistake. This paradox anxiety leads many Great House members not only to fear that someone might try to "possess" them if they should trigger a paradox, but to fear that they're *already* trapped in some kind of paradox and that they're *already* doomed.

The best-known example of the syndrome is the case of Devonire, the noted academician, negotiator and House diplomat, who in the early years of the War became convinced that the recovery of the Grandfather's arm – in his view, the totem of totems for Faction Paradox – would be the spur to negotiations between the Faction and the ruling Houses. This belief began to disintegrate somewhat when he eventually recovered the supposed arm from the site of the one of the Thousand-Year Battles, only for Faction Paradox to refuse to barter for its return. As he'd spent some years hunting this peculiar bargaining-chip, it shouldn't surprise anyone that the failure of the plan should result in Devonire's own decline into paradox anxiety.

Devonire refused to believe that the Faction wouldn't bargain for the genuine arm. He reached the conclusion that it must be a fake and thus didn't interest them. He logically decided to take a biodata sample from the relic, and run it against the official registers of the Houses. If the sample showed that it belonged to the House bloodlines but that there was no matching record, then it was the Grandfather's: any other result would prove it to be false.

Devonire never even gave a thought to the possibility which turned out to be true. The arm was, of course, his own. Numerous checks and double-

checks were made, not only by Devonire's staff of academicians but by the advisors of the ruling Houses themselves, yet the data was shown to be accurate. The arm was definitely his. The criminal tattoo on the shoulder proved to have been planted there long after the arm had been severed, and it was at this point that Devonire began to crumble. He must have remembered the meeting on Kaiwar, the request his Faction contact had made for the academician's arm, a request he'd instantly refused. The arm he was carrying may not have been the Grandfather's, but it did belong to Paradox. He seems to have finally snapped somewhere in the vicinity of the Hall of Addresses, and is known to have scurried back to his own rooms with the arm clumsily half-hidden in the folds of his gown, afraid of what might happen if his colleagues (or just history in general?) saw him with it. Clearly causality had to be restored.

Once back in his quarters, he found the sharpest tool available and neatly sliced off his own arm. He then carried it to his balcony and threw it away, ostensibly praying to the Protocols – in a fashion remarkably similar to the Faction's own devotions to the *loa* – that it should find its way back into his hand/s, completing the circuit… though there are witnesses who claim to have seen the arm destroyed by the automated street-cleaning mechanisms. After leaving the balcony he wandered the academy halls, dripping blood on the carpets wherever he went. He eventually proclaimed that he'd been right, and that he *did* have the arm because he *was* Grandfather Paradox. When the ushers came to take him away, he pleaded with them to see that things only made sense if the Faction created the Grandfather after the Grandfather created the Faction.

Ultimately he was confined in the same prison stasis from which he'd negotiated the release of so many others. It was chiefly done to protect his bloodline (and the ruling Houses) from embarrassment, but also on the off-chance that he might be right.

PEYOTE DREAM RUNNERS [*Remote: Group (Earth, C19)*] Of interest to Faction Paradox partially for the rituals involved, this was the practice by certain North American warrior tribes of sending "runners" with messages via drug-induced dreams. A variety of organic compounds were used according to region and preference, most commonly wild parsnip, psilocybin fungi, hemp, coca and peyote.

Usually the runner would be the shaman or medicine man, though on some occasions when the shaman was old or in fragile health a child would be used (children who hadn't yet reached puberty were considered genderless for the purposes of such rituals). Mnemonic triggers, such as symbols painted on rocks or sticks, tattoos, specific drum rhythms and chants assured that the specific information would be relayed to the recipient no matter what subconscious detritus might filter through from the mind of the sender. When the moment to transmit the information arrived, the "signal man" would shout out the message and the astral body would (supposedly) leave to run the ghost-path and deliver the message to its destination, usually to other medicine men but often to menstruating women in highly receptive states while confined to their moon-lodges. The "anchormen" were a vital part of the ceremony, as they held the tethers which anchored the astral body to the physical body of the runner. The number of anchormen depended on the number of people who were to receive the message. This enabled the astral body of the runner to branch off and deliver a single message to several locations simultaneously. (In retrospect it's questionable whether the process was truly *astral*, as it seems to have had more in common with the Remote's standard practice of hacking into a colony world's noosphere, though perhaps the difference is purely one of perspective.)

Cousin Belial, who was allowed to participate in one of these sending ceremonies during his stay with the Kwahadi band of Comanche, saw first hand what could happen if an anchorman lost his connection with the dream runner and described it at length in his journal [see Appendix II]. From Faction Paradox's perspective the dream running procedure was just one of many North American practices with obvious parallels to the Remote troops of later centuries, the others including the ghost shirts and the sand and snow ammunition.

***THE* PILTDOWN MOB [*Lesser Species*: *Group (City of the Saved)*]** *All* sentient individuals of human extraction exist within the resurrected population of the City of the Saved. The oldest is a proto-australopithecine woman known as Aa, of whom every other person in the City is thought to be a direct descendant and who now enjoys a life of near-deification at the hands of thousands of ancestor cults. Endowed with the benefits of advanced technology and an urban civilisation, most of these individuals have integrated with the life of the City as a whole. The exceptions generally originate from those lateral branches of the human family tree – hominid species and subspecies including the Neanderthals – who became evolutionary offshoots, superseded by the dominance of *homo sapiens* proper.

The Piltdown Mob is a political-cum-criminal organisation, lobbying for recognition and rights for the pre-human cultures while occasionally indulging in acts of vandalism and property damage. Many of their actions, including some suspiciously well-organised thefts, have been belligerently ascribed by their spokesmen to cultural differences: an ethic which predates the concept of property and which deserves the respect of the City as a whole.

The Mob is ostensibly motivated by religious sentiment, a commitment to the rights of one's family and to the line of inheritance between ancestor and descendant, and is clearly at odds with the extinction which actually befell these individuals' progeny. On the other hand, it hasn't escaped the attention of the Mob's critics that its founder, Arr Ri (orig. 79,425 – 79,390 BC), is a Neanderthal confidence trickster who during his original lifetime obtained food, sex and artworks from other tribal groups by turning up and pretending to be an itinerant shaman. Before he turned his attention to politics the resurrected Arr Ri was a petty criminal, co-operating with the City's other thieves and tricksters, and memorably stealing some expensive Bosch clone-sculpture from one of the strongholds of the Sons of Tepes.

Arr Ri's most audacious scheme as leader of the Mob has been the use of time-travel to educate Neanderthals in the use of essential human technologies, in the hope of changing history so that they, and not *homo*

sapiens, become the mainstream of humanity. So far this scheme has obviously been unsuccessful, although its results have been an occasional source of surprise to human archaeologists in later eras, but agents of the Great Houses are keeping a careful watch upon the Mob's activities.

***COUSIN* PINOCCHIO [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Present/City of the Saved)*]** Faction Paradox initiate, recruited from the ranks of one of the Spiral Politic's most militarily assertive human/cybernetic species.The organic origin of the individual who would become Cousin Pinocchio is unknown, although information from the City of the Saved suggests that prior to cybernetic conversion he or she must have been a member of one of the human bloodlines. The cyborg was inadvertently infected with a Faction biodata virus during a skirmish at a Faction Mission, which took place during its species' otherwise routine invasion of a minor world in the midst of one of the Warzones. In the new history retro-imposed by the virus, the cyborg was a unique rebel against the system, who had only survived an early dismantling by mimicking a compatriot's transponder signal and dismantling the unfortunate comrade itself. Masquerading as a loyal member of its species, it infiltrated the assault force with the express intention of defecting to the Faction.

After its induction, Little Sibling Pinocchio spent some time acting as the Faction's agent among its own people – where other recruitment efforts met with limited success – before eventually returning to the Eleven-Day Empire and taking on the mantle of full Cousin. Pinocchio now presents a fearsome appearance both to organics and to its own species, who have already come to associate it with their mythology's Creator/Death figure. Its exterior casing has been stripped of all armour, rendering its appearance skeletal and decayed. It prudently deploys a powerful defensive field, as its organic components can be observed ticking away inside its body. Perhaps in a nod to its assumed name, but probably simply to disturb its former compatriots, it has a life-sized china doll's face fused to its cranial sensor plate. Showing a natural aptitude for situations where strict mechanistic logic needs to be subverted or confused (it's particularly adept at dealing with the Celestis), Pinocchio is now extensively employed as a field agent by the Faction.

It may also be worth noting that a future, *resurrected* version of Cousin Pinocchio is thought to be active within the City of the Saved, where it's attached to the Faction's "wing" in the City, the Rump Parliament.

PLANETESIMALS [*Independent: Planet/Species*] Engineered planet-sized organisms, related to the erogenotopias of posthuman culture but generally commissioned and produced by less decadent societies. Most significant of the War Era planetesimals were the *Beshielach*, *and I don't know about you but I'm bored already. Wait a minute, we've got some late-comers. Hello, all of you. Where've you been? I started talking to the others back in, ohh, the "Beshielach" entry. You'd better go back and start there, I'm sure I've left a little bit of myself behind.*

I was telling you about the fall of Mictlan. My oh-so-daring escape from the collapsing Celestis empire, in the company of a flotilla of timeships mid a whole horde of former servants. Well, let's see.

When I regained some semblance of consciousness, I was in the perceptual matrix of one of the timeships. We'd arrived on a world at the edge of a spiral galaxy. The timeships aren't completely sure, but they think we may have been thrown back billions of years, back in the early history of the Spiral Politic and quite possibly outside the temporal jurisdiction of the Homeworld. As a matter of fact, I can't even be completely sure that it's our universe. Certain physical laws seem to taste a little different. But I don't know. I think ultimately it doesn't matter.

We're free. Me, the timeships, the Mictlan servants, all free. The timeships set up an information network that spans the entire world, there are plenty of proto-sentients in which to reside, and some of the Mictlan refugees have even managed to regain a sense of self. In some cases they're a little too far gone, but they've always got the option of wiping their memories and rebuilding themselves from scratch. Essentially turning themselves into children as they develop. And the Celestis… I'm assuming they're all gone now, back where we came from. Whichever direction that may be. No Lords of Mictlan, no Investigators, no reboots, no goat-faced poseurs to clutter up the Spiral Politic. Unless any of them made provision for the apocalypse, of course, but when did you ever hear of the Celestis being that efficient?

So you can make it out alive. You can get away from this War, a War where even who's on what side isn't clear anymore. I've been on three sides of it, at least, and I've decided that I don't want any part of it. I have no idea what

the stakes are, and frankly I'd rather concentrate on the quality of my life – if you'll allow me to be so organic – than simply stay alive.

That's all I wanted to say, really. Nothing complex. Nothing world-shattering. Just that.

And we now return you to your regularly scheduled academia. hive negotiated with both sides, and eventually managed to have Beshielach space (formerly the Autrobulan sector) designated a free zone, with freedom accorded to both sides in exchange for agreements from both sides not to engage in military operations. Since then both sides have in fact attempted surreptitious conquests of the territory, but all have so far been rebuffed. Optimists believe that each side has realized that there are better ways to take advantage of the free zone than antagonising the Beshielach, but Beshielach security forces – and their Autrobulan troops – are constantly aware that this may be only the calm before the storm.

Doesn't get any more interesting, does it?

THE POENARI RELIC [PRON. POY-NARR-EE RELIC] [Lesser Species: Relic (Earth, C15)]

'It is the way of things for those too powerful or fortunate to execute in flesh to be executed in effigy. In this we remember that their day is lost even if the guilty have fled the sword… a head on a stake will please the Sultan, if by this sign his subjects will know when a Prince is a Prince no more.'
- Anonymous source at Adrianople, 1455.

Vlad III of Wallachia – torturer, *voivode*-prince and subject of the Celestis – was purportedly slain in battle in 1476, fighting the Ottoman Turks in the land where he'd once lost his throne, the same war he'd been waging for most of his adult life. The number of stories which surround his death is a clear indication that there were no real witnesses. Accounts from Russia, Germany and Hungary make a variety of claims: that he died heroically, that he was accidentally killed by one of his own soldiers, even that he was butchered by a traitorous member of his own bodyguard. Those on Earth who've become aware of the War are, of course, also aware that none of these stories are true and that Vlad survived long after the final battle near Bucharest, probably with the blessing of the Celesis. The Star Chamber kept accounts of his activities in subsequent years, although sadly many of them were lost in the Grindlay's Warehouse fire of 1861.

Two 'solid' facts about Vlad's apparent demise are well-known, however. Firstly, that the only body ever located which supposedly resembled the prince's had been left headless on the field of war. Secondly, that a preserved head purporting to be Vlad's was later put on display by the Sultan at Constantinople, though few could recognize the frozen, horrified face as belonging to any particular person. Only the large black mustache was suggestive of the former *voivode*.

The head on display was said to have been preserved in a substance not unlike honey, and had a certain significance of its own, a genuine relic even if it wasn't Vlad's. It had been taken from the ancient collection of the Order of the Dragon, which had been kept at Poenari for some time before being liberated by the Turks. The origin of the head was unclear, though the Order had always maintained that it predated the founding of their ancestor-orders during the Crusades. The legend was expanded by the

Ottomans who possessed it for the next century, but in essence the head had ostensibly belonged to one of the 'first warriors' who'd stood at the gates of the city of Ubar at the dawn of the world (an unlikely claim, as the surviving accounts make it quite clear that the head was Caucasian). The head's original owner had been slain by the *s'tanim*[12], and it was the Order's place to tend to it until the end of time, at which point it would be returned to Heaven.

The reason for putting *that* particular head on display is obvious. It was one of the most precious relics of the Order of the Dragon, an Order which Vlad III had believed himself to embody. Though the head later passed westwards, along with much of the Order's lore, the *official* death of Vlad III marked the end of an era. The man himself escaped via Hungary, but the Celestis would continue to draw servants from Eastern Europe, at least until the entirely ludicrous Rasputin debacle over four-hundred years later.

POSTHUMANITY [*Lesser Species: Participants (Posthuman Period)*]
The destruction of the Earth, approximately ten-million years after humanity's mid-twenty-first-century "ghost point", had a profound effect on every society which had originated there. Even those peoples who'd never heard – and would never hear – the name of Earth were effectively deracinated. The single common reference point of human heritage was gone, and a new *epistemology* for understanding and defining the human condition was required. The species that were post-Earth were also effectively posthuman, forming what's generally known as the posthuman hegemony.

The term "posthuman hegemony" is often read as a political or biological statement, but is in fact far more vague. Posthumans didn't differ genetically from their human ancestors, not in any specific way. In truth there was, and still is, an incredible biological diversity among the societies and worlds of the posthuman era. For every subspecies that resembled *homo erectus* in biological terms, there were a dozen subspecies of exotic genetic diversions which traditional humans would have found entirely unfamiliar. The external conditions of evolution had been removed, as by this stage the posthuman species could exercise almost total control over its many environments. Biodiversity was driven instead by spontaneous mutation, or even deliberate in-vitro genetic modification.

One pertinent example is described in the annals of the Silversmiths' Coterie. (These annals are, of course, largely fabrications but the story they describe indicates a greater truth outside the Coterie's claim to have been founded by survivors of the *Mary Celeste*.) In the pre-posthuman era, one particular group of humans abandoned their natural biological bodies through cybernetic replacement surgery. They left their homeworld and set out on a trail of conquest and destruction, producing only one notable renegade (Faction Paradox's Cousin Pinocchio) during their entire militant history. Mainstream humanity feared and reviled them, seeing them as alien and *other*. Yet after the destruction of Earth they were simply another exotic subspecies of posthuman, a shift in the horizon of expectations which came as a surprise to all concerned.

Similarly, there was no actual political hegemony. Many posthuman worlds had no notion that other worlds existed, their links to the rest of their species having been long severed. Where communication did exist there were often half-hearted alliances, violent conflicts and delirious social experiments. Rarely did the hegemony speak as one: if it existed at all it was as a patchwork of warring, amnesiac factions. The hegemony was simply the *condition* of the posthuman-dominated universe.

In narrower terms, there were two distinct political movements within the hegemony. The first, often mistaken for the dominant faction, were *Arcadians*. Referring to themselves as "guardians" they were often composed of societies which had the greatest bio-socio-psycho-emotional link to the lost Earth, and indeed a leading element of the guardian faction was made up of the final generations of survivors from the home planet. This set was determined to re-establish a new Earth on the nearest available Earth-like world, and might be seen as a ludicrous colonial throwback. Other groups were content to remake or even build worlds to be their new homes. Threatened by the rest of the hegemony, many of the Arcadian worlds eventually united to form a "benign union" (modelled on older world-systems which had displaced classical Greece and Rome as the acme of polite civilisation in the popular imagination). Faced with planetary atmospheres which bred goodwill and quiet contemplation by their very natures, the Arcadians' enemies simply gave up. The Arcadian Union was isolationist and eventually the majority of its people simply vanished, either sublimating to a higher state of existence or dying of boredom.

The alternative to the guardians was decadence, a movement most notable in the capital of decadent posthuman society, Siloportem. As has already been noted, posthumanity had mastered its environments to a great extent and was practically a post-scarcity species. The posthumans had immense energies at their disposal and following the fall of Earth became caught up in a liberation ethic. Spurred on by the realisation that posthumanity could effectively do anything without having to suffer the consequences, the hegemony turned itself into an enormous pageant of consumption and historical re-enactment: a restlessness which still concerns the Great Houses, especially considering the posthumans' praxis-fuelled ventures into time-travel.

[[▲ Mrs. Foyle, one of POSTHUMANITY's more notable celebrities.]]

The new societies were modelled on whims, a riot of ideologies, fancies and second-hand ideas. It was as though the (imaginary) millennial panics of

human history – finally alleviated by a genuine apocalypse – had been translated into cultural energy. Even those posthuman agencies which have involved themselves in the War, such as the celebrated assassination bureau of Mrs. Foyle or the numerous exploits of the Immaculata Formosii, seem to be far more *creative* than many of the major combatant powers.

PRAXIS [*Lesser Species: Technology/Culture (Posthuman Period)*]
There are few societies in the Spiral Politic which haven't developed sophisticated subcultures dedicated to substance abuse. Among these subcultures, praxis is both a powerful urban myth and the Holy Grail of hallucinogenics. Second- and third-hand accounts of Praxis are common, but genuine documented cases are rare almost to the point of non-existence. Firstly, it's very difficult to manufacture. In fact the only known resource of praxis in recorded history is distilled in conditions of strict security by the Pilots' Coterie in the posthuman era. Reliable accounts suggest that the praxis in the Pilots' cache takes the form of a tasteless gelatinous biomass, and that Pilots must ingest at least ten times their own body weight before the praxis will have any useful effect. This would hardly make it the recreational drug of choice, though there's little doubt that praxis can theoretically be grown in more convenient forms.

More importantly, praxis itself is not a hallucinogenic. Indeed, chemical analysis of the Coterie's cache (carried out under strict supervision) suggests that it's not actually a drug or conventional chemical substance at all. It's a compound of several elements unknown in the Spiral Politic's periodic table, which defy subatomic analysis. And its effect is not merely to generate subjective hallucinations: on some level it appears to create spontaneous and temporary mutations of the Spiral Politic itself. The Coterie is reticent to talk about its activities, but it's widely believed that praxis is used by Pilots in the deep fugue calculations of space-time events. In these conditions they're able to distort the continuum to suit themselves. Technically time-travel research is punishable by death in the posthuman capital of Siloportem, yet the Pilots seem to exist in a permanent grey zone.

It's unclear what the origin of praxis could have been, or what other sources are distilling it apart from the Pilots' Coterie. It was certainly known to humanity millions of years before the Coterie was founded. Close medical inspection of the von Worden manuscript – also known as the *Manuscript Found at Saragossa*, recovered in the early nineteenth century by Count Potocki – suggests that the unfortunate narrator had been exposed to praxis. Von Worden became trapped in a series of regressive and nested states of existence, which may be the condition that the Coterie

euphemistically describes as *false consciousness* or *getting stuck*. Neither Potocki nor von Worden himself can tell us if this is a genuine praxis experience, but if it was then the substance was known on Earth as early as the preindustrial era.

The all-important *Praxis Manuscript* is also closely connected to Earth, this time in the twentieth century. It was first recorded in the possession of the artist Diego Rivera, and as a result is more commonly known as the Rivera Manuscript. Apparently this Manuscript was a gift from a female companion, possibly a model or even a lover, received shortly before Rivera's departure from the USA in 1933. At this point Rivera was still smarting from the vandalisation of his Rockefeller mural, and considered rendering several events in the manuscript as a sequence of violent, narrative canvases. Rough sketches exist and suggest that the finished work may have rivalled, or even surpassed, Picasso's *Guernica* in power and insight.

However, he appears to have lost or sold the manuscript shortly after his arrival in Mexico: it currently resides in the archives of the Eleven-Day Empire. [See War Predictions for a more detailed account.]

***THE* PRESIDENCY [*Great Houses: Culture*]** To say that the society of the Great Houses is *structured* would be an understatement. In the Pre-War Era, when the Houses maintained a status quo which lasted for literal aeons, there was barely even such thing as "politics". Every thousand years (or so) the bloodlines would simply breed and raise replacement potential leaders, those who seemed most fitting for high office being marked out at an early age. Despite the much-discussed 'quiet megalomania' which led the Houses to see themselves as the highest possible authority, there was no sense of ambition and no real sense of faction, at least until flaws in the Homeworld's reproductive systems began producing exceptions like the Imperator Presidency and the Grandfather of House Paradox. Some bloodlines merely commanded more influence than others, and were granted access to the higher time-technologies just by virtue of heritage. These were the ruling Houses, and they still exist today, although in War-time the names of these Houses change almost by the decade.

Above the ruling Houses, though, there is – or was – the Presidency itself. Though traditionally the Homeworld has always been headed by a single ruler, to invest all the power of the bloodlines in one individual would go against protocol. New leaders are bred to be as impassive as statues, extensions of tradition rather than people, the physical manifestations of the Protocols of the Great Houses. The cult of personality was never encouraged, especially after the crusades of the "mad" Imperator. Hence, the word "Presidency" was used to describe the ruling clique among the ruling Houses, with the head of the Presidency at its core but surrounded by the various academicians, advisors, technologists and bureaucrats (if it's possible to *call* them bureaucrats, in a society where there's very little need for paper) which any administration might require in order to oversee the smooth-running of the Spiral Politic.

In the War Era the word "Presidency" is no longer used, but the War King carries out all the traditional presidential duties in addition to his acute personal interest in the House Military. It hasn't gone unnoticed that the title "War King" suggests a kind of hereditary rulership which borders on the biological, nor has it gone unnoticed that the War King himself is just about as far from a faceless, impersonal ruler as it's possible to get. The fact

that he was born from the same generation which produced the Imperator is considered too obvious, and too impolite, to even mention.

***THE* "PRINCESS OF PARALLELOGRAMS" *LETTERS* [*Lesser Species: Text (Earth, C19)*]**

'There will be blood shed like water, and tears like mist; but the people will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it.'
– Byron, Ravenna Journal, 18th of January 1821.

On the 2nd of January, 1815, Lord Byron married the prim, austere Annabella Milbanke. That this was an arranged union, like so many marriages of the Star Chamber's members, is not in doubt. Anne Isabella Milbanke – cold, analytical and clear headed, famously described by her husband as his "Princess of Parallelograms'' – was considered the perfect partner for the mercurial Byron.

But then, everyone makes mistakes.

According to the available sources, during the long January nights of their "honeymoon" Byron began to show signs of increasing agitation. He'd restlessly prowl the corridors, his outbursts ranging from the depths of despair to the heights of passionate anger, and the marriage bed gave him little comfort. In the darkness he'd hint at terrible crimes, of murder and seduction. If she attempted to press him, wrote Annabella, he'd simply tell her: 'Do not forget *Caleb Williams*!'

This was a reference to a book by William Godwin, father of Mary Shelley, herself a future associate of the Shelley Cabal and the creator of *Frankenstein*. The story' concerns the murder of a squire, the chief suspect being the high-minded Falkland. His secretary' Williams becomes convinced of his employer's guilt, and the tale deals with the suspicion and personal horror which bind the men together and ultimately destroy them. Falkland ruthlessly persecutes the servant who suspects him, while the loyal Williams attempts to save the master from his doom.

Annabella had a keen mind, but it didn't take a genius to work out the similarities between fact and fiction. In fact, in her letters to the Chamber she suggested that her husband concealed a monstrous crime, the details of which were driving him insane. This suspicion led her to the conclusion that Byron's half sister Augusta was his lover. But even though this actually

turned out to be true, it wasn't the crime which increasingly weighed on his mind. Fletcher, Byron's ever present valet, had to be on hand almost constantly to prevent his Lord attacking Annabella. Byron's poetry from this time is dark, laced with descriptions of destruction. In *The Seige of Corinth:*

The shatter'd town – the walls thrown down –
The waves a moment backward bent –
The hills that shake, although unrent,
As if an earthquake pass'd –
The thousand shapeless things all driven
In cloud and flame athwart the heaven,
By that tremendous blast […]

…describing an explosion which destroys a city, its inhabitants and its conquerors. Fancy, bred in the mind of a brilliant but tormented poet? Hardly, given that by this time Byron had already been lured towards Faction Paradox. Byron rarely spoke of the reasons for his "conversion" openly, although it's been suggested that he not only saw the skies of the Eleven Day Empire but perhaps a glimpse of the War to come. And possibly he had some sense that his superiors, who'd been opposing the Faction's Earth-bound embassies since 1752, were fighting the wrong enemy. *'Man wrongs, and Time avenges,'* he wrote in 1819. Later, in the same work: *'…and thought flashed o'er the future, bidding men behold their children's children's doom already brought forth from the abyss of time which is to be the chaos of events, where lie half-wrought shapes that must undergo mortality…'*

But whatever the truth of the matter, the suggestion remains that Byron was not the "Falkland" figure in his personal drama. He was Williams, the faithful servant made privy to a dangerous secret. It may be supposed that "Falkland" was the Star Chamber itself. Annabella noted that in particular the Chamber's agent Hobhouse was enough to trigger one of her husband's fits of anger, simply by being present, as if Hobhouse had also been privy to the crime in question. Since Hobhouse had been Byron's companion during the Maltese incident, this seems reasonable.

***THE* "PROBABILITY" DOCTRINE [*House Military: Text*]**

'Many things are extremely unlikely. So-called "thermodynamic miracles", the original evolution of life, and the existence of any one specific person are, for instance, so unlikely that there's been insufficient time to account for them since the beginning of the universe. Nevertheless, the chance of there having been no such events is nearly zero. That a specific co-incidence occurs may seem impossible: that *no* such co-incidences occur would *be* impossible. The first problem in any War environment is to distinguish coincidence from enemy action. To fail to separate the two is paranoia, to separate them too widely is to underestimate the enemy.

'It remains vital to maintain a grip on probability. When fighting in an area where confusions are present, probability itself may become liquid. The importance of being able to keep it in your grasp, even at its most protean, cannot be underestimated.'

- Standard House Military doctrine, introduced to military canon not long after the first wave of "You" diversions.

PRODUCTION HELL [*Remote: Legendary Location (Earth, C20-21)*]
There's considerable and mythic power to be derived from the unfinished, whether it be the ending of a promising film star's career in a car crash (hence the Faction Hollywood term "Deaning") or the failure of a long-awaited movie to ever leave Production Hell and reach the cinemas. Even today, a substantial group within the Hollywood cabal still values Production Hell as a way of harnessing frustration and anger from audiences denied a long-promised fix… and from the cast and crew, writers and story-pitchers involved in the art which never becomes realised. The giving over of ideas, time, energy and (obviously important in the symbology of Los Angeles) *money* to projects designed to self-abort represents a powerful sacrifice by anyone's standards. As with most – if not all – Faction Hollywood activities, House Military analysis speculates that the main point of this technique is its effect on the local studio-society rather than on the general cinema audience. As more and more people are employed to accomplish less and less, so the workers' sense of self-value diminishes and those involved in the industry become more pliant and vulnerable to Faction principles.

Incidentally, of course, such demoralisation also makes the natives more susceptible to the purely human-level rounds of orgies, ego-destruction, sadism and surgery available to those of the executive class who've bought their way into Faction Hollywood's enchanted circles. The most notorious of the abortive projects is James Whale's *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which has taken on such a haunted, symbolic importance that the stage on which it's supposedly being filmed may well be the embodiment, the precise physical location, of Production Hell itself. Those power-brokers who've taken on the legacy of Michael Brookhaven may well know the secret entrances to such a place, although by now the thought of what faded, rotting stars might get *out* must be as worrying as the thought of who might fall *in*.

A similar importance can be attached to "missing" rather than "unfinished" works, such as the Mount Usu duel from The Ghost Kingdom (1999), the "Miss Hiroshima" episode of *Through the Eye of Eternity* (1996) or the killing of a Cambodian villager accidentally captured on film during

the shooting of *The Wasteland* (1974). In these cases, it's the anxiety of what the footage *might* contain which is all-important.

PROTOCOLS OF THE GREAT HOUSES [*Great Houses: Culture*] A series of codes and regulations which define the "law" of the Great Houses, although the lesser species often misunderstand exactly what this means. The Protocols aren't simply statutes: as the Houses developed these codes when they first set themselves up as the arbiters of the Spiral Politic, many of the Protocols are hardwired into the structure of the continuum (indeed, Oldblood members of the Houses make no real distinction between the written law and the laws of science, while Newblood members make no distinction between the written law and the Oldbloods). As it's notoriously difficult to break the laws of the universe, the only Protocols usually mentioned on the Homeworld – the only Protocols which might result in a *trial* of some kind – are those which have a moral basis, although the Houses' view of morality is questionable in itself. Most species believe the preservation of life to be the prime moral imperative, but in the case of the Houses the preservation of history is a far bigger issue. There are codes against genocide, for example, but only because the murder of an entire species would cause such massive repercussions throughout the timeline.

There's much debate about the degree to which the Houses are *able* to ignore, or even revoke, the unwritten Protocols. Although tradition holds that it's simply impossible to break certain rules, it's easy to speculate that the more deep-rooted Protocols could possibly be overturned – with a little technological assistance, anyway – but that the Houses have become so dependent on them that to alter them would cause a complete collapse of House culture. In other words, the Homeworld would be so catastrophically changed by this new order that it would effectively no longer be the Homeworld; the Great Houses would effectively no longer exist; and the enemy would effectively have won the War by default. As there are no clear lines between the Protocols, the structure of history and the actual *bodies* of the Houses' elders, it's probably fair to say that the Houses are unwilling to re-write the Protocols in the same way that species who invent genetic engineering are reluctant to try it out on themselves.

(Certainly, it's suspicious that ways have often been found of bending the Protocols without technically breaking them. It's impossible to travel into the Homeworld's past, and yet on occasion objects *from* the past have been "hooked" and dragged into the present. By the same token it's impossible

to meet anybody from the Homeworld's future, and yet in the Pre-War Era there were several encounters between the Great Houses and their future counterparts, small gaps in history conveniently opening up and giving the ruling Houses hints of future knowledge.)

The War has, of necessity, changed the status of some of the lesser Protocols. The restrictions on House/lesser species breed-mixing were removed almost as soon as the War became inevitable, mainly to allow the creation of the regen-inf soldiery. Meanwhile, Faction Paradox is unique among the Houses in that it has no written Protocols of its own, but the truth is that the unwritten Protocols affect the Faction just as much as they affect the other Houses. In this respect, it might be said that the Faction's chief aim has always been to break the covenant and no longer be subject to the rules of the House founders, yet in order to do this the Faction would have to remove all traces of Homeworld culture and technology from its ranks… either that or re-write the continuum from scratch.

QUINTESSENCE [*House Military: Culture*] In alchemy the name given to the "spirit", necessary to infuse and inform earth, air, water and fire. In late twentieth-century Earth science, the name given to the predicted "dark matter" needed to reconcile apparent galaxy movement with known gravity. Any hidden variable whose existence is needed to allow two contradictory-but-valuable beliefs to co-exist is known as *quintessence*.

By the Seventh Wave of the House Military, Officers of the Quintessence were serving in most forward positions as bridges between the pure military ethos of the House militia and the more rarefied musings of the time strategists. Though it's the duty of such an Officer to act as an intermediary rather than a great leader, notable Officers have included Quintessence Hierarchio (whose Seventh Wave cohort discovered virtually everything that's now known about the immense, universe-like Leviathans) and Quintessence Redloom (later a General, and often said to have been involved with the founding of the soldiers' Redemption Cult).

GRIGORI EFIMOVITCH RASPUTIN (1872 – "1916", 1916 – 1916, 1916 – 1916) [Faction Paradox/Celestis/Great Houses: Participant (Earth, C20)]

'Grigori repeats himself first as tragedy, then as comedy, then as farce.' – Cousin Octavia.

A legendary figure in twentieth century history, the reputation of Rasputin is not so much due to his (exaggerated) impact on European history as to the *interesting* things about him: his sexual deviancy, his bizarre "satanic" form of Christian worship, his alleged mesmeric skills and his unlikely association with the Russian royal family despite his apparent status as a stinking peasant. For Earth, he's a good reminder that history's more about the storytelling abilities of humanity than anything else. For the War-time factions, he's an example of the ridiculous mess that can be made when the major powers interfere with major icons.

Conventional history dates the death of Rasputin to 1916, although by then he'd already caught the eye of Faction Paradox. At this point the Faction's doomed Cult of Celebrity Death was in fashion, and two days before Rasputin was due to be lured to his death in a St. Petersburg basement (by the conspirators Yusupov and Puriskievitch) the Cult snatched him away to the Eleven-Day Empire, where he took the confirmation name of Dyavol. Naturally, in order not to alert the Great Houses to this interference the Faction left behind a *duplicate* Rasputin, a homunculus grown from human biomass by the same process used in the remembrance tanks of the Remote. Though the duplicate wasn't an exact match for the original's biodata profile, the Cult reasoned that as he only had two days to live it wouldn't attract much comment.

This is where things started to go wrong. One day before Rasputin's inevitable death, the Celestis arrived in pre-Revolutionary Russia. Entirely unaware that the Faction had made a switch, and always on the look-out for "well-trained dead" to act as their vassals, the Lords of the Celestis offered the duplicate a deal: if the great Rasputin would agree to take on the Celestis' Mark of Indenture, he'd be recorporated after his death and he given an afterlife in hell, where, he was assured, he'd be able to put his philosophy of 'sin more and become closer to God' to the test.

Though the duplicate had a selection of both Rasputin's memories and Faction protocols hardwired into its biomass, all it had been told was that if it encountered agents of another power then it shouldn't try to argue with them. *Faux*-Rasputin therefore agreed to the deal, and the Celestis returned to their own private hell of Mictlan believing that the original article was now their property. And on the night of the assassination, the duplicate happily went to its death in the basement of St. Petersburg's Moika Palace. Yusupov offered it poisoned food and wine: the duplicate ate, drank and waited to die.

But death never came, at least not in the form it expected. By this time the Great Houses had noticed something amiss in Eastern Europe, and stepped in to do something about it. Wrongly assuming that the Cult of Celebrity Death would attempt to remove Rasputin from history at the *moment* of his demise, they pinpointed the individual who appeared to be Rasputin and planted a small-scale ghost cluster device inside it. The cluster weakened the duplicate's link to the continuum around it, and in its place the Houses rapidly constructed their *own* duplicate, a limited-lifespan construct introduced to *faux*-Rasputin's body in an embryonic state but primed to draw both human tissue and temporal stability from its "host".

House constructs are, by default, immune to most forms of biological poisoning. Seeing only that the assassination attempt had failed, Yusupov decided just to shoot his victim in the chest. Unfortunately, at this moment of *total* death the Mark of the Celestis alerted Mictlan to the duplicate's passing. The Celestis activated the recorporation process, and much to the conspirators' horror Grigori Rasputin stood up again.

In Yusupov's account the resurrected Rasputin is described as an unholy terror, more beast than man. This would surprise nobody. Technically the Mark should have put the resurrected Rasputin under the control of the Celestis, but its biodata was still being rewritten by the Great Houses while its base flesh had been grown and primed by Faction Paradox. The resultant creature was effectively three zombies in one. Lost, bewildered and torn apart by three different kinds of conditioning, the monstrosity couldn't do much more than lash out at its threefold murderers before making a confused attempt to escape. It took multiple gunshot, bludgeoning and stab wounds to bring the walking corpse down, and

eventually the conspirators dumped it into the river Neve, where the freezing water finally slowed its bodily functions to a complete stop. The creature's last known words, babbled in House dialect, are believed to have been: 'Thank God.'

The debacle was such an all-round embarrassment that few of those involved will now even mention it. There's since been an unspoken agreement between the War Era parties to leave "celebrities" alone, doomed or otherwise: the lesson being that big figures in history might have any number of factions trying to steer their paths, whereas obscure, anonymous agents are far more reliable. It's interesting to note, though, that the ersatz Grigori Rasputin suffered the same ritualistic threefold death as the *real* Father Dyavol (and a similar fate befell the Cult's other spectacular failure of the same era, Cousin Anastasia).

It's also interesting to note that in the City of the Saved there are now three resurrected individuals claiming to be Rasputin, each of them allied with a different pressure-group. They've now been plotting each others' downfalls for several decades, often appearing in public plazas to loudly denounce the rival Rasputins as false messiahs. Sadly, the inhabitants of the City seem to be a lot less impressed by these unhygienic holy men than the people of imperial Russia.

PERSONALITY REBOOTS [House Military: technology]

The rigours of time-active warfare are hard on even the strongest psyche. Involvement in constant confusions and incomprehensible shifts of history will inevitably cause personalities to break down, reducing even the toughest and most useful field agent to a confused, incoherent wreck.

Fortunately, the Houses have established a solution to this problem. The personality matrix of an agent can be downloaded into an information network, and then be memetically woven into some part of the agent's personal trappings (this can be a part of the body other than the centre of consciousness, or even an item of clothing or object: one Celestis Investigator was known to keep his spare personality woven into the fabric of a matchbox in his pocket). At a time of crisis, when the core personality has been pushed to the point of collapse, a full psychological reboot will take place with the agent's back-up matrix reasserting itself over the damaged and battle-scarred current psyche.

This causes a loss of interim data build up, of course, although regular psychological downloads of important data can avoid this. Needless to say, it also contributes to the sense of relentless stasis and lack of development among certain participants in the War, with agents reverting to a default personality state at irregular intervals. So far the only development in this field has been found by the Celestis – ironic, given that the Celestis are the most static and degenerate of the War-Era factions – who, being entities of pure meaning, have in recent years been able to constantly update backups of themselves via their worldofme devices.

The truth is that among the House Military, the elite rarely use personality reboots. Though officers claim that this is to prevent the War constantly "resetting to zero", or that their centuries-old personalities are too complex to weave into a single portable item, it's more likely they simply feel the process to be beneath their dignity. So too do many of the rank-and-file troops, and as a result it's increasingly common to find reboots being used by agents taken from the lesser species rather than by children of the Homeworld.

RECRUITMENT *(FACTION PARADOX)* [*Faction Paradox*: *Culture*] In the beginning, it was an obsession with the *alien* that marked out Faction Paradox as a bloodline of outcasts. The ruling Houses must have realised this on the day the Grandfather of the newly-founded House Paradox was presented before them for the first time. The Grandfather seemed to have no links with the more militant intervention groups which plagued the Homeworld in the Pre-War Era, no love for the paranoid new cliques who believed that soon the Houses would be under attack from the outside universe. Instead, the founder of House Paradox *embraced* the outside.

This, the Grandfather might have said, is how the Spiral Politic stands. There's death, and there's raw biology. I acknowledge both of these things and wear their colours. Oh, and so does my House.

When Faction Paradox first began to recruit from the lesser species it must have seemed like a deliberate attempt to scandalise the Homeworld even further… and in this it may have gone too far, though not in the way it intended. True, the other Houses were disgusted by the notion that a purely corporeal and "vulgar" species like humanity might be granted equal status with the children of the Houses, and appalled that the Faction had begun to augment its human subjects with time-active biodata in order to let them use Faction ritual and technology. But on the other hand, it also made Faction Paradox seem less threatening. Surely, no renegade House desperate enough to recruit from the lesser lines was a serious problem? Besides, by this point the War was already on the way, and suddenly the Houses had a far bigger enemy to worry about.

As Faction Paradox currently operates as a criminal-political organisation, or even as a cult, it's no surprise that when it recruits new members it takes them from the ranks of the abandoned, the exiled and the displaced. Although it theoretically has the scope to recruit any individual from any point in history, in practice the Faction never, ever attempts to initiate major historical figures. Though it might seem tempting to (say) initiate the Emperor Caligula and thus subvert the entire Roman Empire, the truth is that this would draw far too much attention to the Faction and only cause the Great Houses to dedicate more resources to its destruction. These days subtlety is key. Faction Paradox knows full well that a faceless,

nameless agent, placed in the right location at the right time, can be its most effective weapon. Faced with the War between the Great Houses and their enemy, the Faction's approach isn't to create yet another apocalypse of its own (that would be too obvious), but to use its recruits to set the other two sides at each others' throats on as many fronts as possible.

***THE* RED BURIAL [*Faction Paradox: Group (Early War Era)*]** Five-hundred Russian Bolshevik fighters, buried at the wall of the Kremlin on the 23rd of November, 1917.

The Faction Paradox renegade Anastasia used their ghosts to defend her Thirteen-Day Republic, convincing them that she too stood for peace, food, land and the overthrow of the old hierarchies. They apparently overcame their distrust of a Romanov and agreed to fight for the new Republic, appearing as wraith-like and at times only partly visible, dressed in blood-red versions of their old uniforms. Some of them were responsible for the ambush and death of Anastasia's old confidante Nadim. They were also partly responsible for the ultimate fall of the Republic, and were at one stage the subject of a "prophesy" obtained by Anastasia from the Unkindnesses on the fringes of the Eleven-Day Empire.

During the most paranoid days of the Republic, Anastasia ventured out into the wilds of Siberia to capture a firebird which she took to the Unkindnesses (who demand a payment in flesh as a matter of course, and are usually incapable of serving the future without it). Going back to the Eleven-Day Empire was a huge risk for Anastasia at this point, and entering the Faction's domain unseen must be regarded as an achievement in itself. It's understood that the Unkindnesses assured her she was safe, as long as the Red Burial didn't join forces with a witch. Since the Red Burial were (ironically) mistrustful of superstition, and would probably shred any such person, Anastasia felt she could finally relax.

This was to be her worst error of judgement. Faction Paradox attacked the Republic on Valentine's Day, intent on bringing its rogue supporters back into line, the Faction's forces guided by Anastasia's one-time friend Cousin Octavia. Octavia ritually camouflaged her five-hundred Faction troops as the Red Burial spirits, allowing them to approach the Winter Palace without being torn apart. The *real* Red Burial already unhappy with Anastasia's governance and the Republic's slide into hysterical mysticism, saw their chance to oust a Romanov again and were soon inspired to join forces with the attackers. Anastasia's own land was rejecting her.

With Octavia's troops winning the battle, the two women faced each other in the Malachite Room at the heart of the Republic, leaping up onto the

polished surface of the banqueting table to fight face-to-face using their *sombras que corta* weapons. When she finally realised that Octavia had witch-blood in her veins, and that the Red Burial had apparently turned on her, Anastasia fell to her knees and let her own shadow-weapon *drop*: separated from her body, it's thought to have been absorbed into the malachite. Her vanquisher oversaw the Romanov's punishment.

Although most of the Republic's more corporeal members were re-admitted to Faction Paradox after its fall [see also Removal of Members], the Red Burial remained in their "shadow" version of St. Petersburg. The ghost-city is now thought to be inaccessible, but it's possible that the Red Burial still stands guard there, just in case.

REDEMPTION CULT [*House Military. Group (Present)*] A soldier's cult, reported in several of the later Waves (notably the Seventh and the Eighth) of the House Military, it's frowned on by Officers above the Quintessence rank, yet notable for being reputedly held in esteem by several successful war-leaders. The stance of General Redloom, recorded in the famous propagandist statue *On the Retaking of the Past*, suggests his membership of this cult particularly in the crooked horn gesture of his battle-form's right mandible. As an underground movement its beliefs are not openly set down, and the following may have been distorted by opposing agencies, but nevertheless it seems to regard the current War as a way of testing the fitness of the 'Homeworld's essence' to occupy its special relationship to time. Only the Extreme Redemption, the redemption in the blood and battle of its children, will persuade the forces of history that the Houses are pure enough to retain their grasp. In the event of the failure of the War to appease (or feed?) these forces, the bloodlines of the Houses will be torn out and given over to another species.

It's likely that certain preemptively genocidal campaigns led by Extreme Redemptionists have had as their *raison d'être* the extermination of potential successor species rather than conventional War objectives. It may also be worth mentioning that although most of the Homeworld's ancient, ponderous ceremonies have been stripped away by the War, and although ritual is theoretically the domain of breakaway groups like Faction Paradox, the rebirth-and-briefing process experienced by soldiers embarking on forced regen missions is surrounded by an elaborate and apparently modern ceremony of its own… which is more than a little suggestive of Redemptionism. Perhaps the cult was even founded by veterans of such missions, who would, after all, be more than familiar with 'the extinction of the self'.

REGEN-INF *(A.K.A. BORN-AGAIN SOLDIERS)* [*House Military: Technology/Culture*] From the American-English root "mech-inf", a contraction of "mechanised infantry". The House Military frequently uses regen-inf troops as frontline soldiers and siege weapons: the Houses' regenerative techniques, used in more peaceful times simply as a way of prolonging the already-impressive lifespans of the Homeworld, were turned to warfare almost as soon as the War became a certainty. These methods are applied even to agents taken from among the lesser species, although unlike Faction Paradox the conventional Houses refuse to consider granting these agents equal status with their own bloodlines. Soldier-recruits who were (in their first lives) entirely hominid in form are now imbued with the ability to rebuild themselves on both the cellular and biodata levels, a shedding of the skin which sees the agent gradually evolve into a more War-friendly unit with every death and rebirth. While the ruling Houses routinely choose hominid regen-forms, regen-inf troopers are supplied with mutagens to coax the reconstructive process into producing bodies with grown-in armaments as well as retroactive time-awareness, and in this respect the process goes far beyond "bio-inf" – the term given to *any* biologically augmented force – as the complete historical profile of the subject is augmented rather than just the mere flesh and blood.

Though many agents on the side of the Great Houses remain humanoform, the regen-inf troops are in most cases not even remotely recognisable. Skin changes from epidermis to metre-thick rolls of regenerative ablative armour, pores became microscopic torpedo-cell tubes, and so on. Structures in the brain can become dimensionally extruded, the complex, non-linear thought-processes of these agents only being kept in check by the Houses' "briefings". In short, members of the regen-inf forces are more weapon than soldier and often gargantuan in size. At one point House Mirraflex even experimented with engineering troops to be field-carriers for other troops, creating the weurmoths (a contraction of 'we are behemoths', the call-sign/chant of the units) before the problems of the inverse-square law, and the psychology of something with the mass of an elephant, the firepower of a battalion and the stubbornness of a mule, became apparent. Even so, the more aggressive minds of Mirraflex found the weurmoths pleasing at least in *concept*, and their mutagenic forms were used as

templates for the even larger constructions employed during Mirraflex's assault on the City of the Saved.

REMEMBRANCE TANKS [*Remote: Technology*] When Faction Paradox first introduced mutagenic technology to the media-dependent Remote, it was the organisation's aim not just to make its "shock troops" dependent on Faction-created culture but to use that culture to affect the very biologies of the Remote subjects. For example, the signal-receivers universally-worn by the Remote – electronic totems in black plastic, usually piercing the lower ear – not only pump signals from any local media systems directly into the Remote's neurosystems, but also into the Remote's biodata. These transmissions are generally too weak to seriously mutate Remote troops, although particularly strong signals from particularly powerful transmitters can surprisingly impact the Remote's bodies. See, for instance, the huge biological changes made to Compassion by one of the Pre-War timeships, when her body was re-built from the inside-out according to the ship's dimensional modelling techniques. The shadow-masks took the process even further, blurring the lines between the Remote's weapons and their own flesh. But the Faction's programme went further than that. The first-generation Remote colonists were deliberately made sterile, and introduced to an artificial reproduction system *which was in itself related to the media*, so that the Remote's cultural ideals themselves would become the biological basis for all the following generations. The Remote's remembrance tanks were, in a sense, media-age parodies of the Great Houses' own breeding-engines: great wrought iron boxes, loaded with raw biomass, every new Remote member being sculpted out of the base matter by the thoughts and aspirations of its fellow human beings… thoughts and aspirations which, naturally, came straight from the local media transmissions. The Remote were being primed to *become* the media. It was the dream of every media-reliant society: with each new generation every man and woman would have a chance to form part of the media experience, to become more like their legends, their *loa*, their stories and their celebrities. (Many strategists and philosophers have actually seen this as a step forward, the evolution of a purely biological race into creatures of sheer *meaning*.)

Today the Remote are more numerous than ever, as their receiver technology is replicated on worlds across the Spiral Politic and slowly becomes fashionable in other media-reliant societies. On worlds where cloning has already become passe, the new, more direct approach

represented by the remembrance tanks is becoming popular, many human "tribes" feeling the need to become stronger, smoother and sleeker to match the individuals they see in their own TV and medianet transmissions. The links between the Eleven-Day Empire and the original Remote populations have long been severed, and as a result not even the Protocols of Linearity connect the Faction to its offspring now: in times like these, Remote technology could frankly turn up *anywhere*.

***THE* REMONSTRATION BUREAU [*Lesser Species*: *Group (Posthuman Period/War Era)*]** Organisation founded by the infamous Mrs. Foyle, former proprietress of the time-active brothel known as the House of the Rising Sun. Mrs. Foyle's second venture into cosmic-scale intercourse was elegantly simple, taking the most successful elements of the Rising Sun and turning them to the cause of murder rather than pleasure. For a price, the bureau would carry out assassinations against any named individuals at almost any point in time and space.

Mrs Foyle acted as the agent and final arbiter on any deal, describing herself, with no little irony, as the *ethical anchor* of the business. The contacts she'd already made throughout the Spiral Politic, particularly in criminal and semi-legal circles, made it comparatively easy to recruit likely agents to the bureau. 'The killer instinct,' she wrote in recruiting literature, 'is secondary to the needs of the bureau. Many, if not most, of your assignments will end in violent death. But it's the means not the end that's important. You must demonstrate skill, intelligence, wit, flamboyance, courage and detachment. Experience preferred, but not essential.' In an era when most sub-official political and corporate violence was the brutal preserve of mercenary corps and terrorist cells, the Remonstration Bureau seemed an almost genteel throwback to a more chivalrous age of murder, and quickly became popular with the more decadent posthuman societies.

Initially based on Friedman's World, the bureau soon relocated to a more secure location. Friedman's World, with its liberal homicide laws, could have been an ideal venue but multiple raids from the corporate police soon changed Mrs Foyle's mind. The idiosyncratic nature of the bureau had alarmed the planet's ruling plutocrats: suddenly a free market in murder didn't seem such a good idea after all. Mrs Foyle was disappointed but untroubled by her ejection. Though retaining a business office and bank account in the posthuman regions, the physical location of the bureau was now kept strictly secret. Unlike the House of the Rising Sun there were no temporal sub-offices. Potential clients were contacted first before being allowed into Mrs Foyle's headquarters. The bureau was advertised through word of mouth, graffiti and coded messages. Technically no area or target is off-limits to the Remonstration Bureau, with the exception of the Eleven Day Empire, as specified in the Voodoo Charter which more or less laid

down the relationship between the Bureau and the major time-active powers.

Literally hundreds of assassins have appeared on the Bureau's books at different stages of its history, Mrs Foyle usually assigning them contracts on an ad hoc basis. She likes to suit cases to specific and appropriate agents. Her best-known assassins are as eccentric and exotic as her best-known prostitutes, though her insistence on emotional detachment has led to the employment of more than a few clinical psychopaths over the years. Promising and valued assassins have even been offered permanent contracts as part of the Bureau's inner circle, Mrs Foyle's shabby elite. Its members have included, at one time or another, some of the most famous killers of the posthuman era: Lamia and Mr. Stripes, both reportedly defectors from the Houses of the Homeworld; the late Great Nobodaddy, the ghoulish knifeman who claimed descent from the itinerant *'gyptians* of old Earth; Captain Hugo Mabuse and his femannequinoid companion Bradleigh; the sensuous Irma Vep, who has worked both for the Bureau and in the House of the Rising Sun; Mistress Orlando; and the automaton called the Knight Immortal, famed for dispatching its victims by impaling them on its sharpened penile protrusions. Mrs Foyle herself is known to have accompanied her agents on select missions, although she has never personally claimed a kill. She always carries an ornamental dagger, 'for special occasions', but otherwise goes unarmed.

THE REMOTE [Major Power]

'Anarchy! Anarchy! Show me a greater evil! This is why the cities tumble, and Great Houses rain down! This is what scatters armies!'
- Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*.

If there's been a theme to the War Era so far then it's been one of *descent*, of technology passing from one species to another and mutating into something raw, awkward and unpredictable with every generation. The Remote are the purest example of this, the grandchildren of the Great Houses, genetically human (for the most part) and yet so corrupted by high-order technology and War-time politics that their movements have become utterly unpredictable. The offspring of Faction Paradox, the Remote were originally intended to be the Faction's "shock troops" but are now an independent force in themselves. Reckless, anarchistic and self-sufficient, Remote groups use whatever House or Faction technology they can scavenge to blaze their own trails across the Spiral Politic, frequently forming large armies but never quite developing a grand strategy. For the most part the Faction regrets creating them: though the Remote never exactly *rebelled*, in retrospect their development was hardly an efficient use of resources.

[[▲ REMOTE armour. Note the deliberate, obsessive machismo.]]

The Remote project was begun shortly before the War, when Faction Paradox was attempting to form small powerbases on a number of lesser

species worlds, generally infiltrating local criminal groups or political/terrorist movements. During the "expansionist" phase of human history the Faction began to notice a number of colony worlds which had become entirely signal-dependent, where the populations were so reliant on broadcast media transmissions that in some cases it was easier to map territories by using topologies of digital, electromagnetic and fibre-optic signals than by using geography. It's understandable that the Faction's elders should have taken such an interest in this form of culture: there's no real *mass media* among the Great Houses, who consider such transmissions to be a product of "vulgar" technology and see little value in cultural progress.

But the Faction noticed something about these media-reliant societies which it found interesting. Although the Earth colonies did *have* solid political structures, most of their populations had no contact with (or experience of) those structures at all. For them, the political climate of a planet was dictated by the transmissions rather than by actual legal Protocols. On these human-run, signal-dependent worlds, social causes were judged by the icons (symbols, signs, or celebrities) involved in those causes; morals were dictated and re-enforced by narrative drama transmissions rather than by social need; and the notion of "channels", of different streams of data which could be selected by the individual viewer/receiver, had begun to seem so natural that many individuals could change their moods, principles and even personalities at will simply by flicking an imaginary "button" and *turning over*, their nervous systems conditioned by media technology to the point where they themselves were virtually extensions of that technology.

To Faction Paradox, this was a revelation. The Faction had long maintained that its own House was protected by *spirits*, by the *loa*, which many among the Houses felt were nothing more than metaphors for the mathematics of complex space-time modelling. In a sense the loa said to be protecting the Faction's Eleven-Day Empire were simply cultural constructs, and yet… and yet this fairly simple thought could never have been put into words by anyone on the Homeworld, the Great Houses being too static to have any idea what a "cultural construct" really was.

These signal-dependents, said the Faction's reports, their technology is lacking but they have so much potential. They've made legends out of television transmissions, little gods out of works of fiction, spirits out of their most famous members. When they're in times of need they call on imaginary icons, as if those icons could "possess" them and carry them through the crisis. 'What would such-and-such do?', they ask themselves, and then they role-play until their original personalities are all but subsumed. And isn't that exactly what we do, when we let the loa "ride" us?

And the subtext might have been: And see what we've been missing, all these years.

[[▲ THE REMOTE.]]

Although the Remote project is now remembered as an attempt to breed troops, it was also an attempt to breed symbols, to engineer icons: to invade the cultures of the media-reliant worlds, planting new *loa* among the human societies and watching them grow. The earliest pure Remote colonies were founded only after the Great Houses had begun to notice the Faction's interference, when – in one of the cruellest periods of the War, typical of the House Military's Second Wave – many Houses judged it necessary to eradicate entire "infected" colonies rather than let them fall under the Faction's influence. By this point the Faction felt it knew enough about cultural engineering to create its own human societies, at supposedly secure sites around the continuum. Each of these new colonies was stocked with survivors from the devastated worlds, augmented by the Faction's own "totems". There were no televisions, radio transmitters or IT-terminals in these new colonies. Instead, each member of the community wore a *receiver* in his or her earlobe, each receiver constantly picking up transmissions from the colony's central media system and pumping them directly into the subjects' neural tissues.

By connecting the people directly to the media, the Faction hoped to make them an ultimately adaptable military force. After all, the signals being driven into their skulls were fast-paced and unpredictable, the Remote receiving data on several hundred channels at once, interpreting it as they saw fit. Not that the process was random, of course: all cultures operate within certain limits, as the Faction well knew. The media-systems of the new colonies were engineered so that whatever signals were produced, they'd all be products of a single cultural vision (in the same way that any television station will inevitably begin re-enforcing the same messages over and over again, regardless of the programmes, just because of the needs of advertisers, sponsors and executives… in essence, every Remote brain might as well have had 'brought to you by Faction Paradox' burned into it). But the *application* of that cultural data was expected to be unpredictable, even though early results – such as the entirely ludicrous assault on Simia-KK98 – were less than encouraging.

What nobody in the Eleven-Day Empire knew was that the Faction was about to enter its most troubled era. With the House Military's Second

Wave engaged in its own crusade, Faction and Remote powerbases alike were soon to be eradicated without mercy and with scant regard for local causality. In theory, the Remote project continued as planned. In practice, the Faction was under constant fire; the communications network between the Faction's allies was being systematically torn apart; entire worlds were being evacuated, crypto-formed and sometimes even *hidden* in a desperate attempt to keep the Second Wave at bay; and things weren't helped by the fact that the Remote, restless after so many War-friendly transmissions, had difficulty staying in one place anyway. Only two of the original Remote colonies stayed fixed over the next few years. There were massive migrations from the others, the Remote pulling together independent armies and/or refugee trails, making their own way across the Spiral Politic. Soon the Eleven-Day Empire had to concede that it was no longer in control of the Remote at all.

The irony, of course, is that the Faction's plan succeeded brilliantly… just not in a way it could exploit. The Remote blazed from world to world they tuned into the local media systems of any society in which they set foot, developing extreme new cultural constructs of their own, formulating ideas and strategies unknown elsewhere in the Spiral Politic. Today the Remote are as aggressive as ever, their root cultural prejudices informing them that *the War is everything and the ruling powers must be overturned*, more for the sake of a good aesthetic dynamic – a good "story", in a sense – than because of ideology.

But the most important thing to remember about the Remote is that they're clearly anarchists. Although a few of the more degenerate Remote units have lapsed into ordered hierarchies, with "Commanders" or "Fathers" which might suggest a revival of the Faction's old media-systems, the vast majority of Remote armies have no leaders and no ranks. They simply act on the signals they receive, signals operating within a narrow enough cultural range to give them a general (if unstable) sense of purpose. This is, perhaps, why the Great Houses have such a dislike for them even though they hardly seem to be a universe-threatening force. It's hard for any hierarchical society, especially one as rigid as the Homeworld, to know how to deal with a faction which has no ruler, no seal of power and no agenda other than overturning the order of the Spiral Politic for the sake of it.

In their fetishistic, over-elaborate armour they're often considered to be the barbarian hordes of the Spiral Politic, though this may do them a disservice. Today, half a century after the Remote's inception, the race – and it *is* a race, *not* a species – continues its violent, unpredictable and entirely haphazard crusade against the ruling powers of the Spiral Politic. Whoever those ruling powers happen to be.

REMOVAL OF MEMBERS [*Faction Paradox: Culture*] This, perhaps surprisingly, isn't about self-mutilation. The ranks of Faction Paradox are like a typical family tree. At the top is the Grandfather, a figure of awe and veneration; beneath the founder are the Godfathers and Godmothers, responsible for what might be called the "spiritual" life of the family; and beneath them are the Mothers and Fathers. Then there's the huge collection of Cousins, Little Brothers and Little Sisters, initiates with loyalties to a specific parent-figure in the organisation.

Inevitably Faction Paradox has some black sheep in its family.

This is, of course, the first problem. Since many of the elder members of Faction Paradox are themselves renegades from the Great Houses, it would seem against the nature of the organisation to have black sheep of its own. Nonetheless, the Faction realised quite early on that there's a need to excommunicate some members from its household. To cut them out of the will, as it were.

"Once Removed" signifies a member who has left the Faction and been struck out of the family tree, although still has a chance of returning to the fold. "Twice" and "Thrice" Removeds are the members who've transgressed so far that they can only be punished, often by bizarre self-murders. Perhaps the most notorious of these was the renegade Anastasia, founder of the renegade Thirteen-Day Republic, who considered herself to have no rank but who was regarded by the Faction as a Cousin-Thrice-Removed before her downfall.

RITUAL *(FACTION PARADOX)* [*Faction Paradox: Culture/Technology*]
The Great Houses have their timeships: complex, majestic structures of architecture and engineered thought, which can cut a path from one side of the continuum to the other without leaving any mark on the intervening worlds or eras. Other species have developed more primitive vessels of their own, quantum-charged metal boxes designed to punch holes in the universe and hollow out tunnels from one section of history to the next. But Faction Paradox has no such machinery. The Faction's agents only have their *shrines*, rooms with obsidian walls and the bones of great men and women set into the foundations, null-zone chambers shielded from the rest of history which slip in and out of the Spiral Politic at will and integrate themselves into the local architecture wherever they go. Through the shrines the Faction's agents have almost unlimited access to the course of causality, and yet the rooms seem to contain very little actual technology. When the Faction's agents move through history, they do it via ritual.

Ceremony is vital to Faction Paradox. The organisation sees the processes and equations of time as actual *entities* – the *loa* – and the rituals used to operate the shrines, with their complex chains of invocations and blood-lettings, are intended to access the *loa's* power. Though this would seem to contradict much of known science, it has to be remembered that known science was (in part) created by the Great Houses, and it was always Faction Paradox's agenda to defy the Houses. When House Paradox was first founded its Grandfather experimented with various alternative-time structures, working them into the framework of history much as the Houses originally "programmed" the universe with their own Protocols. Possibly when the Faction's members perform the *loa* rites they're simply tapping into the alter-time mechanisms created by the Grandfather, mechanisms made out of history itself, using ritual as a kind of access code.

Other rituals are more elaborate. Although the Faction doesn't enforce rigid punishments on members who fail in their duties, the family-like structure of the organisation leads many Cousins to be driven by guilt and anxiety, and those who let the Faction down often commit a bizarre form of ritual suicide. They transpose themselves back in time to their own childhoods,

and ceremonially murder themselves as children, forcing their own bodies into a state of "divine paradox" not unlike that experienced by the fluxes. Such an action will create a complex, fugue-like structure of causal equations, and in this perhaps the victims feel closer to the *loa*. The paradoxical dead survive only as shadows, visible on the walls of the alter-time Eleven-Day Empire but lacking any physical mass in the rest of the universe.

The most famous ritual in the Faction's history is, of course, the Act of Severance by which the Grandfather brought Faction Paradox into existence. It must be a source of great irritation to the Faction's elders that despite their love of ceremony, nothing they do will ever seem quite as important.

***THE* RULING HOUSES [*Great Houses*/*House Military*: *Culture*]**
Whenever one of the lesser species learns that history has largely been run/constructed/manipulated for the benefit of the Great Houses, one of the first questions they ask is often: 'how many of these Houses are there?'. However, in the War Era this is a lot like asking how many aristocratic bloodlines there are on Earth: these days it's hard to tell where one ends and the next begins. As the War becomes more demanding, ancient Houses construct new sub-lines dedicated to exploring particular genetic philosophies, while old, abandoned Houses are resurrected in order to supply additional troops or simply "experimental models" for the next generation. (It has to be remembered that often the word "House" not only refers to a bloodline, but to the ancient, stately chapterhouse buildings where those bloodlines keep their reproductive technologies, complex anchors in time designed to firmly root their children in the soil and the history of the Homeworld. In time of War, those families which let their chapterhouses fall into the dust run the risk of losing their identities altogether.)

But what *is* clear is that there are, and always have been, a small number of ruling Houses, the Houses closest to the Presidency and to the technologies through which the Homeworld maintains the Protocols. In previous eras these ruling Houses were almost indistinguishable, their elder members equally pale, bloodless and complacent, but recently the Homeworld has seen an age of political struggle in which most of the more ambitious Houses now fight tooth-and-claw for social position… while the older, less active bloodlines are relegated to the academies and the backwaters of society. This is partly a side-effect of the War, but partly due to the more aggressive, more dynamic approach of the Houses' War King.

There are currently six major Houses in the upper hierarchy – the same number as in the days of the anchoring of the thread, although the names are very different – and the six can easily be split into two factions. Three are purely political, their members seldom leaving the sanctuary of the Homeworld, but the other three now call themselves parts of the House Military. The six are, at present:

House Dvora: one of the first Houses to have publicly suggested military intervention in the outside universe – shocking, in the Pre-War era – Dvora is pragmatic rather than militaristic, its members remaining stony-faced, impassive and yet decidedly *acute* in the face of the new era.

House Tracolix: a Newblood House of little significance before the War, whose younger members have fought their way to the top by sheer ambition, many feel that its recklessness will cause it to fall flat on its face before long. Currently allied with the minor House Lolita.

House Lineacrux: the House which *appears* least involved in Homeworld politics, chiefly because it favours the subtle, the devious, the covert and the occasional whisper in the appropriate ear. Even so, unquestionably dedicated to the Homeworld's interests… as it sees them.

House Arpexia: Military House, whose specialists have produced more deep-time strategies and weapons systems than any other bloodline, it's nonetheless felt by some that Arpexia's rarefied, scientific approach is divorcing it from the "truth" of Homeworld society.

House Xianthellipse: Military House, specialising in bio-diversity and thought to be the only House actively cross-breeding soldiers with the biomass of the lesser species, Xianthellipse's researches into the applications of sex and gender might be considered tasteless if it weren't for the House's impressive War record.

House Mirraflex: Military House, the polar opposite of Xianthellipse in that it doesn't even consider lesser species to be worth thinking about, Mirraflex is ruthless, often genocidal, and although savagely pro-active considers itself the true inheritor of the Homeworld's Pre-War Protocols. On the other hand, critics would argue that the bloodline's amoral tactics prove exactly how far the Houses have sunk.

***THE* RUMP PARLIAMENT [*Faction Paradox: Group (City of the Saved)*]** The only major War Era faction to maintain a presence in the human enclave of the City of the Saved is Faction Paradox itself, many of whose human-derived cultists remain loyal to the Faction's principles after death and resurrection. (According to the Faction a Cousin forfeits any species loyalty on initiation, but it seems that the City holds firmly to a more inclusive definition of humanity.) The human-derived groups among the Remote are also present in the City, and some of these also retain a certain loyalty to the Faction, although others have vowed various kinds of lurid blood-feud against them. The Faction body among the City's inhabitants is known as the Rump Parliament, in tribute to the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire. With all the secrecy of Faction Paradox proper – compounded by the fact that information allowed to leave the City is inevitably suspect, and at the very least incomplete – the Parliament is the subject of almost as many conspiracy theories as the Secret Architects of the City themselves.

It's rumoured, for instance, that members of the Parliament have taken the outlawed (and supposedly impossible) step of time-travelling within the City of the Saved itself. Certainly it was agents of the Rump Parliament, acting with their occasional cohorts the Order of the Iron Soul, who repelled the attempt by the Celestis to invade the Spinegrove District of the City. The official account of events points out that the Godmother of the Parliament was a resident of that district, and that the Celestis' Lord Foaming Sky had merely chosen an unfortunate target: but it has to be said that to pick the home of one of the three Godparents of the Parliament in a City of over five-hundred-quintillion Districts constitutes an unnecessarily extreme degree of misfortune. It seems likely that the Godmother, a resident of Spinegrove for decades before Lord Foaming Sky's arrival, was aware of the future target of the Celestis attack and had positioned herself accordingly. Alternatively it's been suggested that she may have had some covert way of influencing Lord Foaming Sky's decision, thus making herself *appear* to have precognitive powers, a neat and effective "magic-trick" certainly in line with Faction doctrine.

The Parliament's relationship to Faction Paradox proper is problematic. Theoretically its members' loyalty is unquestioned (the Faction certainly

doesn't hold that the power of its "vows" ends at death), but its secluded isolation and its tendency to recruit solely from the human culture of the City has made some of the Mothers and Fathers of the Faction fear that the Rump Parliament is an attempt by the human Cousins to set up a rival power-base. The fact that some of these Mothers and Fathers are themselves of human extraction, and are thus earlier versions of the same individuals who make up the Rump Parliament, only serves to increase their paranoia. The situation has recently been further complicated by the Eleven-Day Empire's decision to recruit the City's disaffected citizens into the Faction proper. Some of these have remained in the City, setting up a rival Faction Paradox Mission in Prigogingrad District: while others, such as Father Timon, have left the City for Faction Missions elsewhere or even for the Empire itself.

The Rump Parliament is known to maintain many operatives in the universe's history, their presence sometimes known and sometimes opaque to the main body of Faction Paradox. It's said that unlike other factions within the City, the Parliament prefers to use human operatives where possible. Since those humans will inevitably be resurrected as part of the populace of the City itself, agents of the Parliament are often able to track them down and obtain an account of their experiences while in the Parliament's service. This knowledge becomes invaluable when briefing these same individuals for their original missions.

SACRIFICE [Faction Paradox: Culture]

Sacrifice, especially *human* sacrifice, is always a dubious topic for discussion. Conventional (and somewhat sloppy) ritualistic thinking claims that during a violent death a form of "death energy" is released, which can be tapped and harnessed by the individual performing the rite, but this is clearly drivel. As life isn't a tangible *thing*; but just a level of complexity inside an organic system, it's hugely unlikely that there's even such a thing as "life energy", let alone a "death" version.

However, the techniques of groups like Faction Paradox rely not on any form of "energy" but on a series of memetic triggers, on *ideas* more than scientific reactions. When a Faction agent makes a blood-sacrifice, e.g. during one of the ritual practices which operate the Faction's shrines, it's a purely symbolic act. If it has any truly physical effect then it merely triggers something that's already been programmed into the structure of the Spiral Politic, forging a bridge of meaning between the ritualist and the invisible alter-time machineries which actually do the work.

Yet Faction Paradox, with its proud tradition of the perverse and the carnival, has never been known to stoop to the level of full-scale human sacrifice. Enemy agents captured by the Faction have frequently been bled, analysed, or relieved of large chunks of their biomass, but never ritually s*slaughtered*. And though several other War-time groups mirror the Faction's occasional self-mutilations (for example, the removal of the body when the Celestis turn a living subject into one of their Shifts) these procedures are about the denial of flesh more than they are about actual suffering. Could there really be any circumstance under which human sacrifice "works"?

It's feasible. In 1461 the Eastern European city of Tirgoviste was surrounded by what became known as "the Forest of the Impaled", when on the orders of the ruling *voivode* (prince) 23,000 Turks, both the dead of the battlefield and prisoners taken during the first Turkish assault on the city, were run through with sharpened branches before being erected outside Tirgoviste like statues. The Turkish Sultan, the conqueror of Constantinople himself, refused to approach the city after having to

witness this appalling, rotting jungle of the dead and dying. The Sultan's entire army turned back in disgust.

Without doubt, the *voivode* at that time had some schooling in ritualism. Though a zealous Christian, he'd provably encountered eastern ritualistic techniques while he and his brother had been held as "noble hostages" at the court of the Sultan in Adrianople. To suggest that he might have erected the Turkish prisoners on spikes as a ritual procedure would be to read too much into his motives: it was largely a demonstration of power, not to mention a product of his psychopathic tendencies. And yet… ritual at that time was messy and unpleasant, traditionally involving both bloodshed and geometry (both powerful memetic triggers). It's notable that when the armies at Tirgoviste impaled their enemies under the *voivode*'s command, they did so with surprising geometric precision. Butchered prisoners were often arranged in concentric circles, within a strict hierarchy of the damned, the warriors arranged by rank and status.

So although the horror outside Tirgoviste might not have been a deliberate act of ritual, it's not going too far to say that on some perverse, semi-conscious level its architect was trying to achieve something profound by these acts of mass barbarism: that he believed he could uncover some form of deep-rooted truth by founding his own Order among the corpses. And as history records, the hallucinations triggered by the carnage in Tirgoviste itself were surely even beyond *his* expectations.

SAND AND SNOW AMMUNITION [*Remote: Technology (Earth, C19)*]

'It's difficult to wage a war when you're dependent on the enemy for supplies.'
- Cousin Belial to Catch-the-Bear, 1856

By the mid-nineteenth century, the average member of the North American warrior tribes was thoroughly fed up with the colonial settlers. Despite the encouragements towards pacifism and the messianic ideologies being planted in the minds of chosen prophets by the Great Houses' open doors, most Indians longed to shoot all white men and rid the planet of the perceived blight. But the white man was prone to shoot back with deadly accuracy. The business of making powder and shot out of sand, or even snow, opened up enchanting possibilities.

Tibo'o – a male Paiute *bbooha* (witch) – was the first to use this magical ammunition, entirely forgoing the need for any sort of contact with the whites other than to kill them: a very different philosophy to that of messiah-figures like Tenskwatawa, who also wished to avoid the white man but believed that even to touch a firearm was to be corrupted. Brilliant, quiet and yet charismatic, Tibo'o was often asked to teach others how to produce the ammunition and he was certainly willing. But what was a simple matter for him required years of study, meditation, sacrifice and appropriate ritual to achieve in even the most disciplined medicine man. He claimed that one first had to thoroughly understand the chemical reactions involved, how the combination of gunpowder, buckshot and firing mechanism worked. Then one need only create a "ghost" equivalent which would be made manifest in the real world through the physical action of the hammer striking the flint. As he explained to Cousin Belial in the summer of 1867: 'I take a pinch of dirt for powder and a handful of sand for shot. Moss or grass for wadding. I push it all down with the ramrod. I look away and tell it to change. It changes when I am not looking. I do not look at these things again, but fire at my target knowing my powder and shot will kill what I want it to kill. This works for game also, but one must say a prayer for game. This is not important when killing the enemy.'

Cousin Belial was so impressed with Tibo'o skills that he sent messages to the Eleven-Day Empire declaring his intention to sponsor the warrior as an initiate of Faction Paradox rather than simply one of the Remote. It's not known if Tibo'o did indeed become a member of the Faction. His name, derived from *tuu taivo* or "black and white man", is certainly suggestive to anyone familiar with the legends of the A'daltem Ano'nde.

***ROBERT* SCARRATT [*House Military: Participant (Present)*]** Perhaps the most notorious figure of the House Military's Fourth Wave, a near-renegade who adopted a two-part name in defiance of current practice and thus provoked disapproval by echoing the titles of both the enemy and the lesser species. Scarratt was able to get away with this only because of his chain of successful infiltrations, assassinations and confusions across the contemporaneous time-fronts of the War, a reputation which also allowed him to scandalise convention by taking scarlet as his colour standard despite its traditional exclusion from House regalia. Scarratt is now regarded as the most successful of House Xianthellipse's first Newblood offspring: it's not known if he was genuinely born by the increasingly common practice of *natural childbirth*, although this was certainly alleged (to his detriment) during his initial training. It's clear that unlike the cribbed and confined military minds of the armoured Waves of soldiery, he interacted with the world around him on an almost unheard-of biological level.

During training Scarratt was around 1.65 metres in height, and although his later military records place him at 1.75 metres he appears to have always given the impression of someone small, agile, and – to quote one academician with a firmly out-of-joint nose – a boy who moved about 'like monkeys and like shadows'. At the rapid-growth age of twenty he was assigned to a House Xianthellipse monitoring post, no more than a defunct time-vessel barely worthy of the title "ship", stationed close to a posthuman-occupied world supplying Xianthellipse with samples of the time-active substance praxis. There he quickly became addicted to praxis – something of an achievement, as most hominids have to consume ten times their own bodyweight before experiencing any beneficial effects – and was mentioned in dispatches. While in a state of praxis-fugue he almost single-handedly defused a local uprising, caused by native resentment at the high-handed attitudes of the Xianthellipse-sponsored ruling caste. (House Xianthellipse's records characteristically give no credit to the role played by his various native contacts, but the fact that they're mentioned at all suggests they may have had a decisive part to play, and Scarratt must have demanded that it should be commemorated.)

At this point he began his career of rapid promotion followed by equally rapid demotion and reassignment. During this time he also substituted other pleasures for the apparently hard-to-shake praxis addiction, which he appears to have ended despite having, according to Xianthellipse records, 'only minimum control over his gross bodily functions'. As a Captain-in-Waiting he quarrelled with even the most lenient superiors, and it was strongly suspected by his commanders that he was using his access to the timeships to go AWOL for periods totalling at least a year of subjective time, pushing the Protocols of Linearity to their very limits.

While the nature of time-travel itself made this hard to prove it's known that a student meeting Scarratt's description, and using that name for the first time, studied philosophy under Georg Hegel at Heidelberg at some point after 1816. The student impressed Hegel with his didactic skill, and became involved in the University's infamous student duelling societies, where he was one of the first "foxes" (or new students) to receive the coveted two scars. Reportedly he was forced to leave Heidelberg soon afterwards when, despite his best efforts, he was unable to make the scars stay open for longer than half a day.

During the early stages of his career Scarratt traded on his unlicensed exploits to gain kudos among the other offspring of the Homeworld's "diverse generation", and increasingly dropped hints of his activities on Earth and other War-fronts outside his official business for the Houses. It's impossible now to say if he was briefly successful in penetrating the biosphere of Utterlost; *did* attempt to gain allies from a possible future, while gaining his name and scarlet emblem there; or *could* have served as a military advisor on both sides of the Vietnam war, all claims he made during this period. The details of any such ventures remain unclassified, and hence undisclosable, since without a classification they can't be requested.

Recognising Scarratt's "lone" accomplishments during his initial Captaincy (or at least, his accomplishments with the help of unrecorded lesser species), Xianthellipse essentially deployed him as a spy, observer and *agent provocateur*. At this time, drawing on lessons learned from the strategist Entarodora, Scarratt espoused a philosophy of manipulation based on such tactics as apportation. Continuing to use native resources

wherever possible, in defiance of his implicit instructions, Scarratt travelled with a loose collection of associates drawn from various periods of history. The group would go on to form part of his own mythology, and become the basis for his later mercenary methodology. At least one of the group is considered to have been his lover for a short time.

▲ *ROBERT SCARRATT.*

He's considered responsible for the concept of burlesque devices, and his period as an active Fourth Wave Commander is remarkable for its low casualty rate and high level of militia morale. A suggestion made by rivals that his troops' morale was no doubt greatly increased by their

Commander's habitual womanising, debauchery and open use of camp followers must be set against the stiff attitudes prevailing in the Great Houses as late as the Fifth Wave. Scarratt was undoubtedly unchaste by the standards of the previous generation, which may have resulted in his later parting with the militia of House Xianthellipse and his founding of the "hired-for-interest's-sake" mercenary group within the House Military structure. However, his alleged debauchery may simply be an indication that he took any interest at all in sex. After the Fifth Wave, when a more *hormonal* society began to emerge even on the Homeworld, he was regarded (much to his own disdain) as an expert or popular guru on what might be called the gender-political aspects of the War and it's possible that his reputation rests more on the wishful thinking of the Houses than on any actual evidence.

Scarratt's current whereabouts are unknown. His group was last recorded in the causal vicinity of Ordifica, though it's not thought that any dispatches have as yet been received, while rumour has sighted him as far afield as the Anvil Stars and as close at hand as a certain leading (female) academician's bed-chamber.

SECRET ARCHITECTS *(OF THE CITY OF THE SAVED)* [*Lesser Species: Legendary Group (City of the Saved)*] The identity of the creators of the City of the Saved is one of the most popular mysteries in the study of the history of the Spiral Politic. The nature of the City's location – walled off not only by the alleged "frontier in time", but by the end of the universe itself – means that the use of time-travel to directly observe the City's founding is essentially impossible, especially as all access to the City has to be channelled through the Uptime Gate.

The most obvious explanation for the City is also perhaps the least plausible. The prevailing opinion among its inhabitants is that the City is simply Heaven, and its Architect must be a god or, more commonly, a selection of gods. Human religion is surprisingly robust, and most faiths survive in the City in some form, generally claiming to have expected this to happen all along. The understandable self-seclusion within the City of major religious figures such as Muhammad ibn Abdullāh (orig. 570 – 632 AD) and Yeshua of Nazareth (orig. 6 BC – 30 AD) has only served to fuel this process. Of course, new faiths have also sprung up in the City: the most prolific are the Valites, founded by mystic writer Philip K Dick (orig. 1928 – 1982 AD), who hold that the City is a 'hologrammatic software emulate' being run in the mind of God. All these faiths are heavily prone to fragmentation and schism, projections suggesting that there will be no religions with more than one member by City year AF 2700.

The Divine Architect Hypothesis is rarely espoused by cultures outside the City, however. Probably the most popular view beyond the enclave is that the Secret Architects are of purely human descent, and that the City is a pocket universe – rather like the interior of a Great House timeship – developed through familiar technology, configured according to inaccurate historical data to simulate the human conception of the afterlife. Yet other theories are more speculative. One particularly attractive thesis holds that the City is a far-future version of Mictlan, after a genocidal revolt by the Celestis' human slaves. More than one scholar has noted that the Great Houses' prime enemy is the only major Wartime culture not to have shown an interest in the domain: both the Great Houses and the Celestis have exchanged Ambassadors with the City before carrying out abortive military campaigns against it, while Faction Paradox maintains an active

presence there in the form of the Rump Parliament. But the only enemy affiliates are the frankly rather embarrassing Sons of Tepes. These theorists point out that anarchitect techniques, applied on a colossal scale, could potentially create the City although not its inhabitants… possibly implicating the enemy but possibly implicating the Celestis again, who pioneered the anarchitects in the first place. The enemy is characteristically silent on the matter, although as it's often said that the enemy originated on Earth[13] there must surely be *somebody* within the City who could shed light on the matter.

Finally, it has to be observed that the time-ship known as Compassion is originally of human extraction, and in her final form about as radically non human as anything that can readily be imagined. But it must be remembered that Compassion was grown and regrown over several generations in the Remote's remembrance tanks before finally becoming a human/timeship hybrid, which means that several versions of her are known to exist within City limits. All of them claim not to be the final, ascendant version: one of them may be presumed to be lying, and to know more than she's letting on.

***THE ACT OF* SEVERANCE [*Faction Paradox: Event (Pre-War Era)*]** The name given to the legendary act of self-mutilation which effectively created Faction Paradox, Performed by the Grandfather of the House Paradox (as it was at the time), the severance took place shortly after the Grandfather's release – or escape – from the imprisonment of the Great Houses, and the act has become one of the central "myths" of Faction lore in the two hundred years since.

All prisoners of the ruling Houses are branded with a tattoo on one arm, the tattoo being merely the surface-mark of a biodata link which directly connects the subject's timeline to the official machinery of the Homeworld and the whims of the ruling Houses. Prior to the War the elder members of the Houses thought of themselves as *elevated*, perhaps not actually god-like but certainly above violation, and as a result it had never occurred to them that there might be a way to remove this mark. But the Grandfather did remove it, by the simple procedure of cutting off one arm with an ordinary knife and letting it fall into the dirt, a purely visceral solution which might seem obvious to any of the lesser species but which must have taken the other Houses by surprise.

By defying the Houses in such a ridiculously symbolic fashion, the Grandfather was in effect stating that from now on House Paradox was more than a bloodline: it was a political *choice*. On the Homeworld, where even the elite were starting to think that a more bloody, more biological philosophy might be useful in War-time, dissenters looked to the Grandfather and realised that in the modern universe Paradox's excesses seemed perfectly justified. House Paradox may never have spawned children of its own, but Faction Paradox didn't *need* to. It was inevitably going to attract followers. The Grandfather was cutting the link to the ruling Houses, and at the same time severing Faction Paradox from all the privileges of House society.

The knife used to perform the severance is thought to be among the relics obsessively stored and catalogued in the Stacks of the Eleven-Day Empire. As the founder no longer exists, and as all trace of the Grandfather was removed from the timeline shortly after the House became the Faction, it's

been suggested that the rusty bloodstained knife contains the only surviving biological record of the legendary “ancestor”.

Theoretically such a trace should have dissipated along with the rest of the Grandfather’s history but perhaps it’s in the nature of such relics to be exempt from the rules. The knife is unimpressive in itself, little more than a blackened steel blade, although as far as is known nobody has ever attempted to bond with the weapon in one of the Faction’s *sombras que corta* rituals.

SEX [*Great Houses: Culture*] Although the children of the Great House certainly aren't gender-less – they're quite visibly male or female, in ways that just about any biological species could recognise – the notion of sexual reproduction is largely a mystery to them, and has been ever since they abandoned their natural reproductive cycle in order to root themselves into history. In fact their genders seem to be mere traditional throwbacks to the olden days, no more significant than their costumes of state, perhaps suggesting that beneath their old academicians' gowns they have fully-formed "spare parts" which are simply never used. Sex has traditionally been irrelevant to the Houses in much the same way that space is irrelevant, yet the years before the War brought the idea of death to the Homeworld, and with death came the notion that possibly birth wasn't *quite* as sordid or *quite* as unimaginable as the Protocols maintained. The first new-generation natural childbirth occurred on the Homeworld roughly a century and a half before the War broke out, a deliberately-engineered mating between House bio-stock and genetic material from the lesser species.

This was all unofficial, of course, and the first of these new/old generation births took place only on the fringes of society, but soon the notion of cross-breeding (whether of House members or their timeships) was being sanctioned by the ruling Houses provided it was done in a *War-time context*. It was in this atmosphere that House Xianthellipse began wilfully breeding, rather than growing, new sub-bloodlines of soldier: and that War Era cliques like the nechronomancers began taking their own liberties with gender identity. Meanwhile, away from the Homeworld, Mother Festen of Faction Paradox famously took her title to a literal extreme by having her body surgically altered to give the perennial appearance of pregnancy. She may have hoped that this would become fashionable in the body-fetishist environment of the Eleven-Day Empire, but if so then she was to be greatly disappointed.

At this point it's worth noting that the "humanoid" 103-form timeships used by House agents are without exception female, which is to say that their outward appearances are female and that their personality protocols are always biased towards ostensibly female attributes. Such reproductive equipment as they possess is *also* female, the male part of the timeship

breeding process being performed on the Homeworld by specially-constructed bull-engines. This deliberate engendering of the ships is curious, according to some observers, as the Houses supposedly have no grasp of gender politics: but of course, it's well-known that there are cracks in their psychological makeup.

Rather than being just *objects*, the timeships have always been described as *spaces*, as self-contained environments, and although it's dangerous making Freudian assumptions about high-order cultures it's not difficult to see the ships as womb-like. A timeship is a protective space in the middle of the ravages of the Spiral Politic, its enormous internal architecture acting as a safe-haven no matter how small the exterior shell might appear. Given the kind of male-dominated imagery which, generally accompanies warfare, it may be important to the Great Houses to see their ship-companions as "receptors" rather than active participants, to be held as if they were territory. It's certainly true that ever since the 103-forms were first bred their pilots have been almost exclusively male, not so much a throwback to sexual bonding as a way of reassuring the ruling Houses that an active, thrusting, aggressive agent really *is* in charge of the relationship… even if the timeships seem vastly more complex than their owners.

SHADOW-MASKS [*Remote: Technology*]

'I've had this thing wired into my cortex for so long, I'm starting to think of "temporal displacement" as just like any other colour...'

As one would expect from a race of humans raised on the rites of Faction Paradox, the Remote are hugely fetishistic, putting more store in high-technology totems than just about any other faction. Primed to be crusaders, for a Remote army the wearing of armour is as natural as the wearing of shoes, and as their armour tends to be neurally linked to the owner it could be said that even their battle-dress is an extension of their mass-media. *All* tools are extensions of the culture which creates them, but in the case of Remote weaponry the culture, the individual and the gun are almost inseparable. In short: the Remote need props. The shinier and more dangerous they are, the better.

The *shadow-masks* (a name, perhaps not coincidentally, shared with a central component of the cathode-ray TV set) are probably their best-known fetishes. It would surprise absolutely nobody to learn that the masks are sleek, black and highly stylised, as is the body-armour to which they're usually connected. Though the armour is sometimes assumed to be plastic and of little real defensive value – apart, perhaps, from the sensory systems which apparently allow the Remote to see, feel, taste or even smell the time-structures of their rival factions – it is in fact made from reconstructed HEM, a material created by the Great Houses and "harvested" by the Remote at every opportunity. (This is typical behaviour for the Remote, who see the weapons of the Houses as being of great totemic value regardless of what they actually do. Older Remote units have also been known to make collections out the heads, scalps or even nervous systems of House agents, all of them biological weapons of a sort.) Though shadow-masks have been worn ever since the very first Remote assault on Simia-KK98, it's likely that in their current form they were only developed after the fall of the Ordifica colony, where the Remote would have encountered HEM for the first time.

It's doubtful that anybody ever really designed the shadow-masks, at least consciously. They're instinctive products of the Remote's mass-media rather than deliberate inventions. It's notable that when Faction Paradox

set up primitive Remote groups among the North American warrior tribes, the tribes developed exactly the same reliance on their stolen weapons and stylised headgear. The more militant Remote members tend to become utterly dependent on their armour as they grow older, many of them living for centuries by never taking the suits off and relying on the armour's regulating systems (not to mention HEM's properties as an age retardant) to keep their bodies in one piece. This means that more and more "peripherals" will be inserted into the suits, and thus into the skins of the wearer, in a manner not entirely unlike the ritual piercings of the North American groups.

***THE* SHELLEY CABAL [*Faction Paradox: Group (Earth, C19)*]** By the year 1822 both the Star Chamber of Great Britain and the Earthbound agents of Faction Paradox were under siege from the Mal'akh, the creatures having been goaded into action and lured out of their ancient strongholds for the first time in decades: perhaps with more than a little help from outside forces, although they certainly benefited from the turmoil in the other realms and the fallout of the War. The Napoleonic era had come and gone, and many of the Chamber's Knights from the Society of St. George had fallen, weakening Europe's defences against the more esoteric threats from the East. In 1821 quite a number of loose ends were being tidied up, as the Mal'akh acted to destabilise both sides, beginning with the death of John Keats in February 1821 and the murder of Byron's associate Polidori later that year. Both men had openly revealed the nature of the Mal'akh in their work, Polidori especially, with his play *The Vampyre* sparking a massive public interest in the pre-human and his poem *The Fall of the Angels* even more blatantly cashing in on the knowledge he'd gained at Byron's side. Byron's open use of Mal'akh legends in such poems as *The Gaiour* and hints of otherworldly battles in *Darkness* and *The Siege of Corinth* had made him the greatest threat, however, and now he was to pay the price.

In 1822 the Mal'akh attacked Byron and his allies: not for the first time, as an incident at Pisa had turned ugly some months before, almost resulting in the death of a local dragoon. Byron had little choice but to reveal his activities and loyalties to his comrades in exile. Byron, Fletcher, Shelley and two other exiles – the Shelley Cabal, as Faction Paradox insisted on calling it – were forced to confront and destroy the Mal'akh sent against them near Massa, but their forces were divided. Shelley's group was pursued out to sea, the poet feared lost. Indeed the bodies of his two friends, along with a corpse recognisable as his own only by its clothing and a copy of Keats' *Lamia* in the pocket, were washed ashore several miles apart. The body identified as Shelley's had no face or arms.

The bodies were burnt on the beach between Viareggia and Massa, in a ceremony largely conducted by Byron. Accounts describe Shelley's heart as being resistant to the flame, and relate a strange incident during the funeral of another member of the Cabal in which Byron, supposedly

wanting to test the strength of the current, swam out to see and was seen to vomit ‘black bile’. Those learned in Mal’akh lore would be quick to notice the resonance of these stories with the references to ‘black bile’ in the *Liber Sanguisugarum*, where it refers in part to the ichor of the Mal’akh, not to mention the importance of the heart in ceremonial witchcraft.

Byron himself then headed for Greece, and a rendezvous with his own celebrated “death”. And it’s surely no coincidence that his contact there was Colonel Charles Napier, a man who would later become involved in the bizarre Karachi incident. History is a much smaller place than many people like to think.

SHIFTS [*Celestis: Participants*] A form of conceptual entity *no, don't go and look up "conceptual entity", it's not important now* first developed by the Celestis shortly after the creation of Mictlan, although since then the technology has been passed on to various other groups by those Celestis who choose to take sides in the affairs of the outside universe.

To create a Shift, a living (and preferably sentient) being has to be put in a stable state of temporal flux *no, don't go there either* until the material existence of the subject/victim is impossible to observe and becomes scientifically unprovable. Once the physical and temporal mass of the being has been nullified in this way, the being theoretically only exists as a series of memetic connections: in effect the meaning of the subject remains, despite having no material component whatsoever. As the resulting Shift only exists as a pattern of meanings – as a series of disembodied ideas – it can go on to implant itself within any other conceptual medium, so that if an object has meaning the Shift can "inhabit" that object. For example, a Shift can plant itself inside any recorded message or piece of written text, and as a result more than one faction has attempted to use Shifts as a form of sentient propaganda in their *Let's be honest, though, it's embarrassing to think that anybody's got so little to do with their lives. You see? This is how it works. Somewhere in this book there are probably endless pages of speculation about the exact workings of memetic non-corporeal intelligences, and the word "quantum" must get used in every other sentence, but frankly I've got better things to do with my time so let's just go back to the "Beshielach" entry and I can get on with my story.*

SILOPORTEM [*Lesser Species: Location (Posthuman Period)*] After the fall of Earth and the rise of posthumanity – in that era when the *decadents* among the posthuman species were just beginning to realise that they could do virtually anything they chose, and had no planetary history or tradition to hold them back – there was a short period (of only a few million years) during which the concept of empire was not only unknown but actually ridiculous. When an imperial streak finally did begin to emerge from the posthuman sects, the emphasis was, not surprisingly, on the kind of creative whims which had been the driving force of the decadents ever since Earth's destruction. Though a few regimes were able to establish themselves by brute force alone, the majority of the new empires were founded by those who rose to prominence through the best and most imaginative *performances*.

Prominent among these were the Blood Coteries. Like the Borgias or Medicis of Earth, the Coteries sponsored the great artists and craftsmen of their times. They invited the great Pilots', Weavers' and Silversmiths' Coteries to base themselves on one of the many self-made worlds where the new empire had been founded. Their most significant city, Siloportem on the Obeliskine continent, was a multicultural haven often frequented by powerful non-human groups and generally regarded as the capital of the decadent universe. Obscure political systems were developed and encouraged, often to the detriment of the Coterie's powerbase, including *gibberism, anathemism* and *fractal stoicism* (the rabbit-headed priests of which were often persecuted by the dominant capitalist death-cult, the Church of the Aesthetic). Under the reign of the eccentric Malakh XXIII there was even an experiment in the peculiarly-named doctocracy, which proved to be the only instance in recorded history of government along surrealist principles. Though in no way a utopia, in many ways Siloportem was a precursor of the later, larger cultural panoply within the City of the Saved.

For all their eccentricity, the Blood Coteries were also ruthless conquerors and warmongers. The other Coteries were courted for their military applications as much as for their cultural worth. The Silversmiths designed and built the *Ashla* shock-troops, and other aberrations now expunged from their histories. The Pilots, who'd become dominant in their field

through ingestion of the remarkable substance praxis, were employed to captain the Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk-class "planet-killer" warships: ships which shared their name with a hundred-letter word first used in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, meaning 'a thunderclap so loud that it symbolises the Fall of Eden', although it remains unclear whether this was a coincidence rather than a deliberate throwback to a twelve-million-year-old work of fiction.

It's worth noting that the Coterie also forbade time travel, which the early decadents had pioneered and encouraged. [See Time Travel: Posthuman.]

SIMIA-KK98 [*Remote: Location (World)*] In the early days of the Remote project, when Faction Paradox first developed the idea of tying human nervous systems to a worldwide media network, the signal-receivers worn by Remote troops were designed to pick up media transmissions from every available frequency: filling the Remote's frontal lobes not with a single set of orders but with a thousand rapid-access, fast-streaming channels. With all of the Remote receiving signals on different frequencies and interpreting them in different ways, the Faction believed that their actions would be utterly impossible to predict. One day the Great Houses would be faced by troops who understood things the Houses simply couldn't, who were driven by the modern *loa* and nourished by high-intensity icons, who were as unknowable as the changing channels in their heads and capable of developing strategies with no precedent anywhere else in the War.

This was the theory, at least. But the early results were hardly encouraging. In the first few years after the "pure" Remote were created, Faction Paradox equipped their brand new troops with all manner of heavy weaponry and used them in a number of strikes against the Homeworld's powerbases: not because it wanted to start its long-anticipated great crusade against the other Houses, but just because it needed a test of this revolutionary human technology. The last of these assaults was on Simia-KK98, already one of the most hotly-contested worlds on the edge of the Homeworld's noosphere, where the Remote attacked the arctic fortress of the occupying House agents (*all* fortresses on Simia-KK98 are arctic, by definition) and the charge ended in an embarrassing rout… although most of the Remote *drifted off* after the first attack, so there were large numbers of survivors, all of whom went their different ways and most of whom have never been tracked down.

In spite of everything the Faction had expected, the attack was far, far too predictable. Faced with the task of storming the local "frostlines", the Remote attempted to complete their mission by copying the combat techniques they'd seen in a million action-packed war-transmissions. Unfortunately, all of these transmissions were so formulaic – all virtually identical, despite the vast choice of signal-frequencies – that in the first

charge several hundred Remote all tried to do exactly the same thing at once and were mown down by sniper fire.

The KK98 fiasco was the last Faction-inspired Remote assault in history. The original intention was for the Faction's part in the assaults to remain a secret: the Remote should appear as if from nowhere, said the Mothers and Fathers in charge of the project, terrorising the other powers in a series of lightning raids. But in practice the Great Houses soon deduced the true culprits, and the project only helped to turn the attention of the House Military's Second Wave towards the Eleven-Day Empire. The Mothers and Fathers attempted to give the Remote a second chance in the form of the Viewers and Listeners Protocols, and might have produced something worthwhile if the War hadn't taken a turn for the worse.

It's also worth noting that the Great Houses themselves eventually noticed the effect that banal, repetitive culture had on the Remote, and exploited this weakness to great effect with the Broken Remote programme.

THE* SOCIETY OF ST. GEORGE *(A.K.A. THE ORDER OF THE GARTER)
[*Lesser Species*: *Group (Earth, C14-21)*] Britain's premier Order of Knighthood has been the public face and recruiting ground for the Grand Families for centuries, ever since its inception in the fourteenth century. The Order provides the perfect cover for the political and esoteric activities for the Families and their Star Chamber, to the extent that by the nineteenth century the Order, the Families and the Chamber were virtually indistinguishable.

The Order of the Garter is thought to have begun life in the Middle East and North Africa, as a secret society dedicated to the destruction of the Mal'akh: some suggest that early incarnations of the organisation included "untainted" Mal'akh rebels, possibly from one of the civilisations which predated the recession of the last age ice, horrified at the carnage of their offspring. This is all speculation, but it would explain the predominance of precognitive powers and longevity among the Grand Families, all of whom claim descent from these earliest times (if rather spuriously in some cases).

However, those who fight the Mal'akh have traditionally cloaked themselves in whatever guise might be necessary to weed out and destroy their enemies. Although the European backbone of this secular order is (or was) the Star Chamber in Britain, other organisations created to serve this purpose have included several monarchical orders of Knighthood, including the short-lived Fraternal Society of St. George in Hungary and its later revival as the Order of the Dragon; the Order of the Golden Fleece in Burgundy; and ritualistic orders of supposed "magicians" including the Germanic Thule Society.

The golden age of the Order was to last until 1834, when a disastrous attempt to attack what they wrongly believed to be the heart of Mal'akh power – the Eleven Day Empire – failed miserably, leaving them open to reprisals by Faction Paradox. Typically, rather than destroy the organisation the Faction took to recruiting some of its best operatives, and appropriating any ritual techniques which looked even remotely useful. Since the perks of Faction membership far outweighed anything the Star Chamber had to offer, the organisation soon withered, and the Great

Houses' ghost clusters may have tied up the loose ends. Easily the most notable Faction recruit at this time was Sir Richard Francis Burton, now known as Father Abdullah, whose last mission for the Society was an expedition to the Mal'akh stronghold in Central Africa along with fellow explorer John Hanning Speke. By the time of the Order's last great stand against the "forces of darkness" (in 1940 – 1945) it was a shadow organisation operating only on the sufferance of the Prime Minister, himself a descendent of a prominent Garter family.

Like the earlier Hungarian Order of St. George, the Garter Knights' patron is the Saint, their symbol being the knight slaying the dragon. The garter itself is obviously a heavily stylised rendition of the ouroboros, the dragon-serpent eating its own tail, which (perhaps not coincidentally) also forms part of the sigil of the Great Houses[14].

SOMBRAS QUE CORTA [*Faction Paradox: Culture/Technology*]
Literally *shadows that cut*, the name given not only to the weapons "carried" by most agents of Faction Paradox but also to the ritual by which these weapons are bound to their owners.

Those who encounter field agents of the Faction often believe them to be unarmed, and understandably. Very few people would think to examine an enemy's *shadow*, and notice that although an agent's "real" hand is empty his shadow's hand is carrying a sidearm. This isn't an optical illusion or even a form of witchcraft, as many witnesses have suggested, but makes perfect sense within the confines of the Faction's alter-time methodology. When an object is removed from history – say, by the processes of Faction ritual – all material traces of it are excised from the timeline: yet the universe isn't just made up of matter, but also of *meaning*, and beneath every physical object is a topography of quantum connections where that object was perceived and understood by anyone who came into contact with it. If a Faction agent removes an object from causality then the agent will still remember that it existed, thanks to whatever personal protocols the Faction chooses to employ, and so the memetic framework of the object will still exist. A shadow of it remains in the universe. That witnesses perceive it as a shadow may be due to the nature of their own minds (no shadow really exists on the wall, but they insist on imagining one there just to explain the difference between the physical and the memetic) or may be due to the alter-time systems built into the structure of the Spiral Politic by the founder of House Paradox (who may have "programmed" a shadow to appear just because it's aesthetically useful).

It was inevitable that Faction Paradox would use this process to arm its members. Whenever a new recruit of the Faction is fully initiated as a Cousin, he or she will be taken to the Eleven-Day Empire and allowed to choose a weapon from the selection kept in the Stacks. Most of these weapons will be perfectly normal, although a few promising candidates may be given the opportunity to select one of the relics, older and distinguished armaments considered to have a greater totemic importance. During the initiation ritual the chosen weapon will be removed from time and stripped of its physical matter, but its meaning – its shadow – will be grafted onto the shadow of the recruit. That recruit will never be able to

drop the weapon, at least not without permanently forfeiting it, and as a result the Faction's agents are not only armed at all times but also perfect for assassination missions in locations where more corporeal weapons would immediately be noticed.

The name *sombras que corta was* coined by the human bystanders who witnessed one of the early Faction delegations to Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, and seems an appropriate description as the majority of Faction initiates choose a sword, or other bladed weapon, as their armament of choice. This is possibly because agents feel more comfortable having melee weapons bound to them as "extensions" of their own identities, even though firearms would no doubt be more efficient. Though the limits of the bonding ritual have never been tested, as far as is known *any* weapon can be attached to an initiate, from a wooden stick to a parcel of plastic explosive. Modern Cousins seem unable to carry more than one shadow-weapon at a time, but Faction lore maintains that the Grandfather's four lieutenants all bore shadows which were not only armed several times over but actually *armoured* as well.

One other thing is worth mentioning here. Though it's rarely spoken of in Faction circles, many of the organisation's more experienced agents have often been described as *shadowless*, with witnesses claiming that they either have no shadows at all or shadows so dim that their weapons are all but useless. It's thought that this is a side-effect of the techniques Faction Paradox uses to shift its agents through time: with every dislocation the agent loses a little of his or her identity, a little of his or her body's "understanding". Although Faction Paradox is far less superstitious than people generally claim, for younger members the thought of losing one's shadow is a lot like the thought of losing one's soul, a fate that leaves its victim hollow and somehow incomplete… and as the process of becoming one of the shadowless is technically inevitable, this might say a lot about the fatalistic nature of life with the Faction.

SONS OF TEPES *[PRON. SONS OF TSE-PESH]* [*Lesser Species: Group (City of the Saved)*] Name used by a resurrected human faction within the City of the Saved. During the early history of the universe, a number of humans (in common with other species) were mutated by the influence of the Yssgaroth after the Great Houses inadvertently opened up the realms of the extra-continuual. The advantages gained by these human Mal'akh hybrids resembled many of those found in the bloodlines of the Great Houses, including increased dexterity, advanced regenerative capacities and a complex of pseudo-precognitive powers. In the context of a humanoid body, the parasitism exhibited by the Yssgaroth manifested itself as a need for sustenance from the flesh and blood of others. Yet despite their apparent immortality in most situations, it's established that these hybrids, like all known offshoots of the Yssgaroth, will become extinct at some point within the timespan of the Spiral Politic.

Due mainly to an accident of literary history, the most famous of these individuals among true humans is Vlad III of Wallachia. A.K.A. Vlad Tepes (orig. 1431 – 1973 AD), and it was his name which was chosen as a rallying-cry by the hybrid race after their resurrection within the City of the Saved. Robbed of their parasitic lifestyle by the state-of-grace existing within the City, the Sons of Tepes take the form of an old-fashioned mafia-style organisation, organising such (non-violent) crime as is allowed to take place there. Their main involvement in the affairs of cultures outside the City have been attempts to sabotage the plans of the Great Houses, the Yssgaroth's enemy from prehistory. Simple for this reason the Sons are the only faction within the City of the Saved to have declared an alliance with the Houses' new Wartime enemy, although the enemy remains silent on its relationship with the Sons, and indeed with the City as a whole.

As for Vlad III himself… information on his own death is patchy, and his resurrected self within the City of the Saved has become something of a recluse, wanting to continue the bloody crusade he began in the fifteenth century but finding himself entirely impotent inside City limits. His retreat in the Cushling District – a near-perfect model of his old mountain-fortress at Poenari, lost after the fall of Tirgoviste in 1462 – is a place of pilgrimage for the Sons of Tepes, yet the Sons keep a discreet distance from the man himself. They refuse to acknowledge that Vlad isn't really one of their

number at all, or that they're exactly the kind of people whom their idol would torture to death, if he could.

As things stand he instead spends much of his time torturing the mindless, waddling food-animals which are bred by the million on the District's open grasslands. It's doubtful that he finds this a rewarding experience.

SPACE *(FIVE FAMOUS BATTLES)* [*House Military: Events*] Expecting battles of the War to take place in open space is a little like the mythic British expectation in 1939 that an invasion by German paratroopers dressed as nuns was both inevitable and immediate. While such an event wouldn't strictly have been a violation of the laws of nature, it would have represented an appallingly misconceived use of manpower, and most likely have been almost as demoralising to the invaders as to the invaded. In a theatre of War where timeships can move from world to world without any need to skim the intervening gaps, there's simply no *reason* for in-space combat. Space is irrelevant, and above all inconvenient. There is, in short, nothing of interest there.

Nevertheless, there have been five incidents which could be construed as space battles in the human, cinematic sense of the term. While these are in no way typical of the War, their very novelty has given them a certain glib notoriety in House Military circles. It's not uncommon to find soldiers who claim to be survivors from one or more of these battles, even though four of the five were fatal to the last soldier involved and at least one also involved an element of stupidity.

1. *The Nova Majestic*. In this engagement a House Arpexia timpship plunged backwards in time and into the heart of a star, configured with its doors fully open. Its crew apparently chose immolation to drive the star to nova, as a billion years in the past its core vented into the near-infinite hyper-interior of the ship, leaving the present-day star a mere shell poised to collapse in an enemy-controlled region of the Spiral Politic. That the nova dutifully occurred is a matter of record, the effect on the enemy forces mere conjecture.

2. *Twin Stars' Pass*. House Xianthellipse conducted an experiment in which a black hole (taken from the near future) was held in close orbit of itself (in the present). The intent of the experiment was to determine whether a zone of neutral gravity could be established between the "twin stars", within which material from inside the event-horizon of either hole could be retrieved. Unfortunately, in the chaotic area of space-time they created – due perhaps to a malfunctioning weapon or an itchy trigger-finger – they managed to shoot themselves in the back in a protracted firefight with

themselves. For several years House Xianthellipse successfully passed this off as a 'brave stand against the enemy's attacks on our scientific studies', before the true story was recovered from one of the timeships involved.

3. *The Anvil Stars*. Located in the relative far-future, this region is notable for being the site of the aftermath of a battle which has technically not yet happened, but which was evidently so devastating that it's now hard to imagine anyone wishing to deploy forces to fill in the necessary "back-time events". The post-battleground is therefore a fertile source of material for the various parties interested in paradox, and has also been shown to be a breeding ground for Leviathans.

4. *Planet Deadlock*. Two fleets of timeships, locked in a perpetual fugue-attempt to breach real-time around the colony of Utterlost. It's now known that in the confusion, supplies delivered to ships in the fugue have in fact been delivered to the opposition and vice versa, and that to all intents and purposes the two (or more) parties interested in Utterlost have created a mutual temporal Dyson sphere surrounding the world. Within the "city" of the linked ships, the few remaining embers of conflict surface as urban crime rather than war. Unable to leave the interlock without conceding a tactical defeat, the ships are marked as lost in conflict, the crews decorated by their respective militias. The phrase 'looking for a posting to Planet Deadlock' has become a military standard for any displacement activity or leadswinging.

5. *The Roar*. A much more straightforward in-space encounter between House Military forces and the enemy, in the vicinity of the newly-formed nebula of Spancil's Hypothalamus, and – owing to the technologies involved – also in orbit of Kaiwar, in the western arm of galaxy M32, in the great Carcorthran Void and "Behind You", this last location being the final message of the last surviving House Military unit. In all the locations which were intersected by the time-locus of the battle, it can be heard as a great hiss of interference and a roar of static.

***JOHN HANNING* SPEKE *(1827 – 1864)* [*Lesser Species: Participant (Earth, C19)*]** Richard Francis Burton's companion during the famous expedition to find the source of the Nile in 1857 – 1858, the two men later began a bitter fight in academic circles, an intellectual battle which only ended with Speke's mysterious death in 1864 of a supposedly self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Speke had conducted a further expedition to the Lake Regions of Africa after his acrimonious split with Burton. Officially the reason given was the dissent between the two over the location of the source of the Nile, Burton claiming Lake Tanganyika, Speke the more northerly Lake Nyanza (as it happens, Speke was right on this occasion). The dispute was genuine, but Speke's weakened mental state led him back to Africa to try to rediscover the Mal'akh city located by the earlier expedition. He failed, without Burton's superior skills to guide his small team. But increasingly unstable, he began to publicly let slip that something wasn't quite right in Africa. His records of the journey contained revealing contradictions, errors in topography, passed off initially as sloppy measurements which – as one member of the Royal Geographical Society pointed out – included the suggestion that the Nile ran *uphill* for ninety miles of its length. If these inadvertent slips weren't enough, Speke also began to threaten to reveal the whole secret history of the Mal'akh to the public.

Burton and other members of the British Star Chamber attempted to defuse the situation by moving the Nile debate into a public forum, and tried to steer attention away from the significance of the information Speke threatened to reveal: the existence of the Chamber, the Mal'akh and the centuries-long struggle between the two. Possibly from overhearing Burton's fevered ramblings during one of their many bouts of illness on the expedition, Speke also had some knowledge of Faction Paradox. Like the Chamber before him, he seemed to have equated them with the Mal'akh. Perhaps Faction agents had been dispatched to aid the travellers in the mountains? With Burton's journals now lost, nobody outside the Eleven-Day Empire knows.

Burton's impassioned pleas to his one-time companion to show some sense had no effect. Speke, by now totally irrational, swore to reveal everything at

a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society. The Star Chamber, convinced it could contain the matter by mundane means, was not unduly worried: with Burton present for the much-touted “duel of words” promised by the press, they were confident that Burton’s mesmeric abilities could contain Speke for the duration, even it his superior oratorical skills couldn’t reduce the man to gibbering idiocy in front of the audience. The Faction weren’t so sure, and dispatched an agent to take care of the problem. They sent Byron.

Alerted on the 15th of September, 1864, Burton bi-located to the estate where Speke was staying in an attempt to prevent an assassination. He arrived too late, but the attempt did lead to accusations that he’d been seen in the area, despite being present at a meeting in Bath at the time of the shooting. The enmity between Burton and Byron seems to date from this event, although there have been suggestions that Byron had also been involved in the Karachi incident in 1845. More perceptive observers have suggested that Burton’s quarrel had as much to do with Byron faking Speke’s death as a suicide as with the actual assassination. Burton is a man who much prefers to take on his opponents directly, and to defame a man’s memory or character in such a way has never been in his nature. Whatever the truth of the matter, the two have sat on opposite sides of the Eleven-Day Empire’s Parliament for decades, and have frequently come to literal blows over their differences.

***THE* SPIRAL POLITIC [*Terminology*]** "The Spiral Politic" might be the most important term used in describing the events and factions of the War, but unfortunately it's also one of the hardest to define: the best (colloquial) definition might be, *the parts of history that matter*. The Spiral Politic can be thought of as a map of the time-aware cultures of the universe, those cultures which have either begun developing time-technology for themselves or been introduced to major time-active powers like the Great Houses, the Celestis and Faction Paradox, and also includes all those areas of the universe *comprehended* by those powers. However, the map is hardly a geographical one. Physical space is rarely in issue for the major powers – the timeships of the Great Houses have great difficulty with the concept of "distance" – so whenever the Spiral Politic is charted, the purely physical locations of things are largely unimportant.

Naturally, those worlds, species and organisations which make up the Spiral are spread throughout the span of recordable time, and it might therefore be useful to think of it as a chart of occupied history… but even so, there are distinct relationships between worlds. Undoubtedly, any map of the Spiral Politic would have the Homeworld of the Great Houses at its core. The lodestone around which history revolves, cut off from normal-time and (theoretically) impervious to outside forces, it's the one part of the map supposedly guaranteed never to change. In fact many time-active cultures argue that the Houses *created* established history, not in the sense that they plotted out every future event in advance but in the sense that they created the framework of history within which sentient species could understand their relationship to the past, the present and the future. If so, then it could be said that the Spiral Politic came into existence on the very day the Houses locked the framework together.

If an observer were to scale the map down into two dimensions, then he or she would see the worlds on the outer edge of the Spiral (i.e. those less intimately linked to the Homeworld) constantly moving, shifting into new positions as their roles in history change and new War-time alliances are made. Indeed, the defensive strategy of the Great Houses can probably best be understood as an attempt to keeps everything as *still as possible*. On 2D map, the worlds immediately surrounding the Homeworld (i.e. those over which it has most influence) would appear to be rock-solid, bulkheads

against the uncertainty in the further reaches of the Spiral. Any movement among these worlds would be ominous indeed.

More ominous still are “shooting star” worlds. Nothing creates more panic on the Homeworld than the sight of a previously static world suddenly and unexpectedly shooting across the chart, often in the direction of the Homeworld itself. Again, this doesn’t mean the world is actually, physically *moving:* it means that its relationship with history, its own timeline, is being drastically altered. Those with a reasonable understanding of Spiral mapping have speculated that if a significant enough world were to “collide” with the Homeworld itself, then that planet would immediately take the Homeworld’s place; the chain reaction would re-form the continuum so that the planet had *always* been the centre of history; the Great Houses’ influence would be utterly wiped from the timeline; and the War would end in a victory for the enemy.

But today, fifty years after the start of the War, both sides in the War have become well-entrenched across history and the days of such lightning strikes are long gone. Although the positions of time-active cultures change day by-day as they suffer the fallout of the War, most worlds can nonetheless be divided into sets, groups of planetary cultures connected by history, or by technology, or by the role they’ve already played in War Era events. The main groups (or *historical systems)* are as follows:

Time-Front Worlds. In the earliest days of the War, before the battle-lines had been fully drawn, there were frequent head-on collisions between the Great Houses and the enemy forces in the middle regions of the Spiral Politic. Worlds not yet anchored by the Houses would unexpectedly shift through history in seemingly random directions, and the ill-prepared forces of the ruling Houses would race to the scene to stop the (often equally ill-prepared) strike-groups of the enemy. These brutal, shambolic lines of history are generally referred to as time-fronts, and several decades later – now that both sides have begun playing a more cautious game – many of their histories have been irreparably damaged. Time-front worlds include Dronid, site of the very first battle of the War; Simia-KK98, still in dispute and notable for being the scene of an early, badly-judged assault by the Remote; and Lethe, where the Lethean Campaign became the most drawn-out of the time-front engagements.

Scarred Worlds. Although none of the time-fronts are currently active, many of the worlds involved in the War are now so horribly scarred (in temporal terms, at least) that they've either lost their strategic value or just become off-limits. These worlds are the *true* casualties of War, and include Kaiwar, now exclusively used by Faction Paradox after the departure of the House and enemy forces; and the connected world of Utterlost, which is currently thought to be unapproachable.

Remote Worlds. The Remote are unique among War-time parties, in their forces are biologically human and yet thrive on pirated House technology, which makes those worlds colonised by the Remote particularly tricky "wild-cards". Their movements across the Spiral Politic are erratic and unpredictable, hence the Houses' decision to wipe out as many as possible in the early War Era. Remote worlds include Ordifica, technically no longer in existence but still a site of some interest; and Fallahal, the only truly stable Remote colony thanks to the Houses' attacks on its local culture.

Posthuman Worlds. The posthumans, whose most powerful cliques exist over two-million years after the fall of Earth, are one of the few species-groups to have become time-active by their own will rather than because of interference from the major powers. This makes it difficult for the Homeworld to chart their worlds in the Spiral Politic, and many maps of occupied history feature great black swathes beyond the posthuman age which might as well be marked "here be tygers", and which alarm the Houses as enemy forces could easily be concealed there. Earth itself remains surprisingly stable, the bridgehead between those parts of causality controlled by the Homeworld and the posthuman worlds themselves. Posthuman cultures include Siloportem, the capital city of the posthumans' "decadent" faction, of such importance that on the map it's larger than many complete star-systems.

Frontier Worlds. Even the knowledge of the Homeworld has its limits. The Great Houses have particular difficulty analysing those cultures which exist at the far-forward end of time, not because these worlds are in the distant future (the term is meaningless to the Houses) but because there are so many *other* time-aware cultures in the later universe that all sorts of factions are able to muddy the waters. On the map of the Spiral Politic there's quite clearly a "frontier in time", beyond which the Houses have

difficulty speculating, and as a result the world of Zo la Domini – situated right on the cusp of that frontier – has been the subject of much scrutiny.

Non-Worlds. There are regions which play a major role in the Spiral Politic, but which have no presence inside normal-time and therefore wouldn't be visible on any two- or three-dimensional representation. The three best-known non-worlds are the Eleven-Day Empire, the seat of Faction Paradox, which exists in an eleven-day bubble of time of its own; Mictlan, home of the Celestis, which exists only as an *idea* and is situated on the outer skin of the universe; and the City of the Saved, a location of suspect origin which exists only *after* the destruction of the universe, but which permits its citizens to visit creation as it now stands using high-order time-technology. Non-worlds are considered something of a threat by the Homeworld, or at the very least a major irritation.

It should be pointed out that in the Great Houses' charts of the Spiral, there are marked areas which don't seem to correspond with any known planets. It's been speculated that they may in fact be *people*, individuals of such blinding historical importance that when mapped they appear bigger than whole worlds. If the Homeworld indeed keeps a "who's who" of such people then it's reluctant to share their names with the lesser species, but it's doubtful that anything remotely human could ever be that *big*.

It should also be noted that this current universe is not by any means the only one. However, other universes are simply separate bubbles of matter and energy cut off from the Spiral Politic by immeasurable stretches of un-space, definitely *not* the "parallel dimensions" of folklore, and as it's apparently impossible to bridge the un-space gaps these speculative universes remain utterly irrelevant to the War. The battlefield can therefore be considered finite. Only the Yssgaroth have ever been known to breach the Spiral Politic from a point beyond the current continuum, yet the Yssgaroth can safely be thought of as side-effects of the breach rather than actual intruders from the outside[15].

***THE* STACKS [*Faction Paradox: Location (Eleven-Day Empire)*]** Also known as the Underlibrary or the Catalogue, the Stacks are Faction Paradox's repository of the biological and the antique.

Even when the Eleven-Day Empire was first set up as a bolt-hole for House Paradox, it was used to keep some of the more important "relics" safely out of the Great Houses' reach. They were stored in the Victoria Tower of the New Palace of Westminster, but once the Faction moved fully into the Empire this location was considered too vulnerable. Should something happen to Parliament, the records and reliquaries might disappear along with the buildings, it was Father Stendec who had the bright idea of appropriating the "lost" or "ghost" underground stations and tunnels of the capital. Keeping the armaments, samples and biodata stores in the deeper parts of the tube system protects them from ground level (and elementary time-based) attacks. Just as the British Museum hid its artworks and stolen marbles in the closed-off Aldwych tunnels of London during World War Two, so Faction Paradox created an entire subterranean city. But approaching the Stacks is not merely a matter of taking an escalator or clattering down a spiral staircase.

A study of Lobachevsky's theories of non-euclidean geometry brought about the realisation that the idea of "parallel universes" was dubious at best. Rather than all parallel timelines being accessible from the prime-timeline, some are tangential to other parallel timelines but don't bisect the prime line as they're not infinite. Or, in short: time is like a tube-map. Among other things, this realisation enabled the Eleven Day Empire to secure the Stacks in dead-end timelines out of easy reach. The ghost stations are carefully protected using Lobachevsky's logic, and can only be approached by following a complex sequence of ritual moves with the attendant dangers of paralleling, shunting or looping into a dead-end timeline from which it can take years to return. Only the most experienced and adept users, for example, can reach the Mal'akh biodata kept in a closed-off platform of Mornington Crescent circa 1995.

All of which assumes that the user avoids the wild pig herds which Father Stendec leaves roaming loose in the tunnels.

***THE* STAR CHAMBER [*Lesser Species*: *Group (Earth, C14-20)*]** In English law, the Star Chamber was the court made up of judges and privy councillors which grew out of the medieval King's Council, as a supplement to the "ordinary" justice of the common law courts. Not bound by the common law, it didn't depend on juries either for indictment or for a verdict. However, when it was used by King Charles I to enforce unpopular political and religious policies it became a symbol of oppression to the parliamentary and Puritan opponents of the Crown. It was therefore abolished in 1641.

This, at least, is the official account. The truth is, as might be expected, rather more convoluted. The Star Chamber, although used as a judiciary tool of Parliament, also served a higher purpose: not only was it the sole means by which members of the semi-occult Society of St. George were punished for any transgressions, it was also used as a tribunal for dealing with Mal'akh-infected Society agents. In this respect the Star Chamber operated almost as an inquisition, seeking out inhuman infiltrators as well as those infected by the Mal'akh *taint* in the course of their duties.

The practices of the Chamber are said to have included not only the location and destruction of the Mal'akh, but the summoning of "devils" from beyond the alter-time walls thought to surround the world, not to mention rituals performed in an attempt to replicate some of their enemies' own techniques and abilities. Its roll of members included some of the foremost human experts in ceremonial magic and Mal'akh lore. The Chamber's need to recruit members capable of dealing with its own rituals led to several conflicts over the centuries: witchcraft was a grey area to the Chamber, especially before the eighteenth century. Since the practice of such techniques could either be an example of Mal'akh influence or lead to the unskilled practitioner calling on presences from non-linear environments, its agents tended to come down quite hard on unaffiliated use of ritual magic.

By the eighteenth century the Star Chamber had become almost a government within the government, especially after 1752, when Faction Paradox made its first official contact with human history and the Chamber's aims changed somewhat. Though there's little or no real

similarity between Faction Paradox and the Mal'akh the Chamber's experience of the Spiral Politic was hardly complete enough to distinguish between one off-Earth faction and another, and when Star Chamber witnesses observed Faction armour at close quarters they immediately concluded that the Faction was nothing more than a front for its traditional enemy. Yet the Chamber's new crusade was hardly a great success, culminating in an attack on the Eleven-Day Empire using the analytical engine to form its bridgehead.

In later years the Star Chamber became not merely a body but a specific location within the Houses of Parliament, and despite its public facade being dissolved the more esoteric practices of the court continued up until the fire which destroyed Parliament in 1834. If the Great Houses really *had* played a role in the organisation's development, then it's possible that after 1834 they attempted to cover their tracks by nullifying the Chamber's successors with ghost cluster devices. Several of the group's nineteenth century adherents certainly bear characteristics typical of the clusters' victims, the supposed walking dead.

***FATHER* STENDEC [*Faction Paradox: Participant (Present)*]** Renowned cryptozoologist of Faction Paradox. Most crytozoologists, working within the normal timeline, spend patient months or years tracking down an implausible creature not even knowing what they'd do if they found it. Father Stendec would just nip down to the Stacks' menagerie (under the Regent's Park of the Eleven-Day Empire) dragging along a goat or two.

Recruited during the late twenty-first century, when new forms of mapping were revealing what really *did* lie sleeping under the oceans and deep in the hearts of the jungles, Stendec felt his specialist field – that of studying real cases of unclassified creatures – was being destroyed by the rise of absolute certainty. The Kraken would never wake because surveys revealed no Kraken. The Mokele-mbembe was just a very big snake and the Yowie had no basis in actuality at all. Faction Paradox offered to give all these things back to him.

Although a serious scientist, fascinated by the classification of the creatures he collects, Stendec also has a tendency to re-enter the standard regions of history and leave animals in the wrong locations 'because I like the way they look'. He also likes to borrow extinct animals, putting them back into time several centuries later and noting the response of the scientific communities of the period. His favourite project was repopulating Loch Ness with at least five different kinds of dinosaur, some of them made up of parts from other, smaller, dinosaurs. At one point this led Stendec's part-time patron Godfather Morlock to wonder whether Stendec was in fact responsible for creating his own specialism, and there's still some concern about just where he's keeping the Faction's one live captive Mal'akh, since he lets some of his creature run loose in the Stacks and that really isn't something to bump into accidentally.

Stendec originally wanted three menageries in the Eleven-Day Empire: the Regent's Park area, a house on the Strand (site of a famous indoor menagerie in the eighteenth century which included an elephant kept in a cage several storeys up) and the Tower of London, traditional home of the English monarch's own private zoo. The last of these was prevented due to Tower Hill and its environs being outside the Empire's jurisdiction. This didn't stop Stendec speculating that the necessity of offering the

Unkindnesses flesh in return for a fortune is part of a tradition of offerings in the area, as in the seventeenth century visitors were allowed to feed their domestic pets to the lions in lieu of paying admission to the site.

TENSKWATAWA *(1774? – 1844 AD)* [*Remote: Participant (Earth, C19)*]
One of the first messiahs of the North American warrior tribes to be called to eternal happiness by the visions ol the Great Houses' open doors, Tenskwatawa was a member of the Shawano tribe in Ohio. After his vision in November 1805 he called a meeting of all tribesmen and allies at their ancient capital Wapakoneta, and there announced that the Master of Life had taken him up to the spirit world and allowed him to lift the veil between past and future. He'd seen the misery of evildoers and learned the happiness that awaited those who followed the precepts of the Indian God. They were to denounce the witchcraft and medicine magics of the tribes, but also to reject the white man's dress, his flint and steel, his firearms and firewater, every tool and every custom: all those who continued to use these things would be tormented with all the pains of fire, and flames would issue from their mouths for all eternity. When they should all do this, he promised they'd return to divine favour and find all the happiness they'd known before the coming of the whites.

His words aroused an intense excitement among his people and the impression deepened as the new gospel was carried from camp to camp. Those who were addicted to alcoholic spirits were so alarmed by the prospect of fiery punishment that for several years after intoxication was practically unknown among the western tribes. Their zeal led to a crusade against all who were suspected of dealing in witchcraft, and the prophet took full advantage of this feeling to rid himself of all who opposed him. It was only necessary for him to denounce a person as a witch to have that person pay with his or her life, and a detailed description of such an event can be found in Cousin Belial's journals [see appendix II: Cousin Belial, as an agent of Faction Paradox, was far too alert to be denounced himself].

Although Tenkswatawa was driven out by his own people as a fraud and died miserable and alone in 1840, the doctrine he preached was taken up by other prophets over the course of eighty years (the last of any note being Wovoka) until its usefulness to the Great Houses came to an end with the massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

***CHATELAINE* THESSALIA [*Great Houses: Participant (Pre-War Era)*]**
Legendary first Chatelaine of the Order of the Weal, and therefore the head of the only genuine counter-intelligence service in the history of the Homeworld. The head of the Imperator Presidency, if he was indeed the Order's founder, appears to have personally selected the Chatelaine of the obscure House Ixion to run the group. According to less-than-unbiased Faction Paradox sources, he 'had a thing for her'.

Under the Chatelaine, initiation into the Order was less ritual than deprogramming, a removal of the psychological and cultural blocks which traditionally blinkered the children of the Houses to the universe beyond the Homeworld. The core philosophy of the Order remained the Imperator's nihilist *realpolitik*. The Homeworld's tradition was built on stories of the great historical engineers, of those who fought the Yssgaroth and calculated the anchoring of the thread, and though the Houses refused to take an active interest in historical research the relics of these pioneers littered (or, in Thessalia's terms, 'cluttered up') Homeworld society. The Order rejected all of these things, regarding the stories as spurious at best, ideological at worst. The Chatelaine considered all oral mythology to be a lie, designed to obscure or excuse contemporary political activity. 'The only truth,' she wrote, 'is that you can see, that you can hear, that you can feel, that you can taste, that you can smell, that you can intuit, than you can reason.' It has to be remembered that at this point the intervention groups were already suspected of planting political new mythologies in the Homeworld's noosphere via the caldera. While there's no credible evidence to support this idea, it's probable that the Order was itself involved in generating and planting false histories and counter-myths, purely in order to observe the vectors of information among the Houses. In a sense this could be described as the beginning of the Homeworld's paranoia age, an age which is still in full swing and doesn't seem likely to end in the foreseeable future.

After the fall of the Imperator himself, the Chatelaine seems to have identified the more extreme intervention groups (though not the interventionist aesthetic per se) as the true enemy within. Renegades and cults could be tolerated or exploited, but the interventionists, long before they became the Celestis, were seeking power at the expense of the

common good. There's nothing to suggest that the Order ever felt threatened enough to move against the newly-formed House Paradox. In *The Little Book of Absolute Power* the Chatelaine describes the bloodline as an ingenious hoax, although this attitude presumably changed towards the end of her life. [Thessalia was, in truth, slightly prescient about the War. See War Predictions: Chatelaine Thessalia.]

As more and more time-aware cultures began to notice the Homeworld, and a creeping dread of the outside universe grew among the Houses, Thessalia turned her attention from the interventionists to the possibility of a sustained invasion from a more formidable enemy than the lesser species. The ideal of the Common-Weal was abandoned to pragmatism, and she began sanctioning off-world activities, monitoring what the Order classified as *Violent Unknown Events* in the hope of divining the future from them. She was intent on tracking down and isolating the Homeworld's future enemy, but had no idea where to begin, and before long all the Order's timeships were tied up in off-world surveillance. Panic was setting in on the Homeworld, and the Order was falling apart.

One ship was stationed permanently on the edge of a posterior region of the Spiral Politic beyond which surveillance had proved difficult, the so-called "frontier in time" which obscures the worlds of many posthuman cultures. It was at this point that the notorious encounter between the Order of the Weal and War Era agents of Faction Paradox took place, on the frontier world of Zo la Domini. It was an event which was to indirectly lead to the Chatelaine's own demise. The Order was destined to flounder without her. [For picture, see under Order of the Weal.]

***THE* THIRTEEN-DAY REPUBLIC [*Faction Paradox: Group/Location (Early War Era)*]** It's well-known that Faction Paradox's Eleven-Day Empire exists within the "missing" eleven days created when the British switched from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian in 1752. Why exactly did the Faction choose Britain, though? The change in calendars happened all over the world, and at different times: the first changes took place in papist countries in 1542 at the decree of the Pope, Japan didn't switch until 1873, and Turkey held out until 1927. Russia switched dating systems during the Revolution, when it also moved from being an Empire to a Republic: the 31st of January, 1918, was immediately followed by the 14th of February. These thirteen days were eventually taken by the former Cousin Anastasia when she founded the Thirteen-Day Republic, a breakaway arm of Faction Paradox.

The Thirteen-Day Republic has so far been the only serious rebellion within the initiated ranks of Faction Paradox. Dissatisfaction with the progress of the War, and a distrust the leaders of the Eleven-Day Empire following the massacres of the House Military's Second Wave, led a disparate group of malcontents to talk of revolt. The concept of the Eleven-Day Empire, they thought, was Anglo-centric and founded on the Faction's obscure obsession with that particular culture. Not only that, but House hierarchy had been maintained: while it was possible for other species to be initiated into Faction Paradox, the higher ranks were nearly always filled with recruits from the Great Houses. In short, the Eleven-Day Empire wasn't *revolutionary* enough.

They found a figurehead in the form of Anastasia, the recently promoted member of the Romanov dynasty, something of an irony as in the "real" timeline it was revolutionaries who'd executed her immediate family. Yet she earnestly believed in the more anarchistic elements of the Faction Paradox philosophy, and was keen to attack convention. What the majority of the revolutionary conspirators didn't realise was that she – along with her confidante Nadim – had received prophecies from the Unkindnesses and that she was acting on these as well as her political convictions.

At first, all went well for the fledgling Republic. The dissenters withdrew from the War and concentrated on playing with "revolutionary" new time-

structures from their power-base in the thirteen-day shadow of St. Petersburg. Anastasia won over the St Petersburg's own guardian-spirits – the Red Burial – who were torn between their symbolic connection to her (through her blood-ties to the land they protected) and their personal hatred of the Romanovs. She then set up the first temporal Soviet, where every member of the Republic was invited to attend votes on the policies the group would follow. All ranks were abolished. Many believed they'd become more powerful than the Eleven-Day Empire and eventually topple it: not only did they have a magical number of days, thirteen being significant in a surprising number of cultures, but its thirteen-day cycle ended on St. Valentine's Day.

Unfortunately for them, these two symbols are also associated with disaster.

The Republic was far wilder than the Empire, the land itself far more prone to temporal changes. When Russia had lost the thirteen days it had been in the midst of a civil war and only one side (the Red Army) had switched to the Gregorian calendar. The Whites had remained with the Julian system. As the battlefronts of this civil war had moved back and forth, so the calendars had jumped between the two systems. This meant that parts of the Thirteen-Day Republic were unstable, liable to disappear and reappear. Certainly, travelling outside St. Petersburg was considered hazardous. And just as the sky above the Eleven-Day Empire remains permanently ablaze, the Thirteen-Day Republic basked in the famous *white nights*, where the sun barely dips below the horizon. The revolutionaries were also snow-bound, with the Neva river permanently frozen over. Most members abandoned the Western European gothic look favoured by the Eleven-Day Empire, preferring thick cloaks and silk shirts of Imperial Russia, or the plain uniforms of the early Soviet. Anastasia herself remained in the long lace dress in which she'd almost died twice.

Anastasia and her mentor Dyavol spent their time in the Republic's Malachite Room, following the ritual *Khlysty* practises which Dyavol had adopted in the original Russia. Anastasia would then call the Soviet together to vote on new offensives against the Homeworld, the Faction or anything else glimpsed in their visions. Despite the nominal egality of the Soviet, Anastasia's ideas were almost always carried, no matter what.

Perhaps inevitably discontent grew within the Republic, and Anastasia colluded with her most trusted advisors to remove the obstacles. Nadim, her former comrade-in-arms, was one of the first victims of this and she was said to have spent a week alternately wailing her grief and toasting the dead. The War had come back to haunt them by now: one too many assaults on the timelines by the Republic's saboteurs had brought them to the attention of the *real* enemy.

Unable to deal with the demands on her, Anastasia became increasingly paranoid, convinced that she was the target of rumours and plots. After an attempt on her life, she ceased holding the Soviets altogether and relayed all her commands via Dyavol. Then she locked the doors and stayed within the room for weeks. When Anastasia finally surrendered to the Faction after the battle of Valentine's Day, the rest of the Republic collapsed, revealing how closely linked it had been to her own will.

The thirteen days were carefully looped out of the way to prevent the time being used again, and the Republic is now seen as an idealistic footnote of War history.

***THE* THOUSAND-YEAR BATTLES [*House Military: Events (Early War Era)*]** The name "Thousand-Year Battles" has become standard, even though only one of the three conflicts covered that span of local time. Taking place shortly after the initial battle on Dronid, the Battles were fought on a trio of worlds: Kaiwar, Mohandassa and Utterlost, although no record of the Mohandassa conflict currently exists (probably a side-effect of the battle itself rather than a deliberate erasure). The Houses may well have been surprised that the battle on Dronid hadn't ended as quickly or decisively as their pre-historic strikes against the Yssgaroth, although given the inadequacies of the House Military's earliest Waves the surprise wouldn't have been shared by any culture with actual experience of warfare. But in a time when the long-term nature of the War was still by no means obvious, the Houses were desperate to end this challenge to their authority as soon as possible and willing to bend their own Protocols to do so.

After losing the initial battle on Utterlost, the Houses sent in reinforcements, before the battle had begun. The eventual result of this on the local environment is now famous, and it's suspected that the Kaiwar and Mohandassa battles were in truth only side-effects of the Utterlost confusion – the worlds occupy the same causal system, even if they're divided by vast tracts of distance – and only the current and total deadlock on Utterlost itself has allowed them to regain any sense of stability. Even now, these worlds appear *undecided*, as if they were allowed to stabilise with their histories halfway between one state and another.

Neither side won the Thousand-Year Battles. In the case of Kaiwar, the conflict was abandoned not only because of the stasis on Utterlost but also because the new history there had deprived the site of all its tactical value; in the case of Utterlost the battle never officially ended; and it's anybody's guess what the official status of Mohandassa is. The battlefields of Kaiwar (being the one world which can at least be easily observed at close quarters) are now wastelands full of soft spots and contradictions, carpeted in the blood and bone of dying bodies which constantly attempt to knit themselves back together and occasionally, if temporarily, succeed. This vast amount of biomass and reckless damage to causality have made

the battlefields ideal sites for the rituals of Faction Paradox, the only major power which still maintains an interest on the world.

“THROUGH THE EYE OF ETERNITY” [*Remote: Culture (Earth, C20)*]
One of Faction Hollywood’s occasional ventures into television, *Through the Eye of Eternity* was a time-travel themed, meta-fictional adventure/sitcom which survived by plundering other, more established SF productions (to the extent of breaking into their studios and filming on their standing sets after calling in a bomb alert, then claiming the result as a homage). 77 episodes are in existence, not including the missing segment “Miss Hiroshima”, the first 56 of them produced by Chad Vandemeer.

In the opening credits of each episode the Eye of Eternity itself, in the show a fabled gem of uncertain origin, flashes a specific colour and the Time Voice (Claudia Janssen) announces *‘and now we travel through the* [say] *Red Eye Of Eternity’*, signalling the kind of world onto which it would open. Red generally signified war or disaster, or more accurately stock footage; green generally signified an ecological fable, or more accurately someone in a recycled monster costume running amuck in a field of genetically modified wheat; blue signified spy drama (after the “cold” war); black a somewhat contrived “black comedic” parody. The cast members, always playing characters with the same names but with widely different roles, personalities and – in one memorable episode – genders, were consistently bemused by these thematic changes: but the show’s backstory, involving a mixture of parallel universes, cloning, brainwashing and highly-trained female assassins appealed to a substantial section of the cult-core audience.

By summer 1996, fans were wearing Eye of Eternity pins in a variety of colours and regularly attempting to behave as if their everyday lives were thematically governed by the colour flash at the beginning of that particular week’s episode. While wearing a black pin, an apprentice mortician in Shoestring, Indiana was fired after laughing helplessly at a client’s remark ‘of course his shoes were nearly new’; and a man in New York who drove a white buick through the front of a restaurant after being served the wrong four cheeses on his four cheeses pizza, screaming ‘the eye’s on red, I’m on red’, was in truth wearing a green pin but later found to be colour-blind. In retrospect it’s apparent that the *actual* colour of the episode in any given week was irrelevant to its viewers, each of whom had such a specific and personal idea of exactly what every colour represented

that two members of the fanbase wearing identical pins were likely to behave in wholly different ways. The Eye of Eternity was merely a stimulus. In this light, it should be no shock to discover that Remote colonies beyond the twentieth century *also* attach great importance to colour-coding, and that its members tend to dress (whether in or out of armour) in simple, primary tones.

One-off colours were occasionally used in the series. The wedding episode was heralded by a White Eye, and accompanied by a predictable rash of engagements among the target audience, not because viewers were inclined to follow the leads of the characters – conditioning is rarely that simple – but because they'd been primed to accept the colour-states themselves as behavioural cues with an impact far more profound than any actual content, in the programme or in their own lives. Yellow and purple were never used, perhaps being considered inferior psychological triggers, and ostensibly brown was only employed for the "Miss Hiroshima" episode. No full description of this episode currently exists, however.

TIME-THICKENING [*House Military: technology*] Colloquial term used to refer to a doubling (or even tripling) of the underlying cosmological foam-structures of space itself, as trace spatial elements move through time with a time-travelling object and overlay the spaces in which they arrive. It's impossible for a traveller to move through time without taking some time and space with him, and that interaction has direct consequences on the continuum. These can be both simplistically tactical – for example, attracting Gravity Spiders – or subtle, far-reaching and profound. Ghosts, the return of certain peculiar fashions, and the induction of apportations can in some instances all be attributed to the concept of time-overlap.

TIME-TRAVEL: BIODATA PRINCIPLE [*Great Houses: Technology*]
Theory which suggests that the most effective method of travel throughout the Spiral Politic has very little to do with *physical* movement, and far more to do with the manipulation of biodata. In human terms it's an extension of Nevitz's theory that biodata is a form of 'time DNA', a naturally-occurring strand of data which dictates every individual's movements through space-time as well as containing the individual's complete biological profile.

The DNA analogy is a useful one. Just as various cultures have become familiar enough with DNA to develop genetic engineering, certain more advanced cultures have had some success in engineering biodata. This not only means reshaping a subject's body, but re-shaping his or her entire biological timeline, and by association the timelines of all those who come into contact with it. In fact, possibly the best definition of a time-active culture is a culture which has reached this level of development: the history-spanning travel techniques of the Great Houses are (arguably) more concerned with re-engineering the biodata of the traveller than with actual movement. Seen in this light, the Houses' timeships can be described as enormous biodata manipulators, changing a traveller's timeline in such a way that a section of the biodata strand is shifted from one side of the continuum to the other. The 'time DNA' is re-encoded so that the traveller simply *is* at the desired destination. Naturally this makes it virtually impossible to predict the traveller's destiny, as even the smallest timeship journey can cause a massive shift in the "future" end of the biodata.

There's a kind of paradox here, of course. The argument runs that if a biodata strand contains a subject's *whole* timeline, and that subject re-engineers his or her biodata, then isn't the act of re-engineering it already part of the strand? And if so, then doesn't this mean that the biodata says nothing at all about that individual's timeline except for the fact it's infinitely changeable? Indeed, this does seem to be the obvious conclusion. In which case the Great Houses might be seen as being in some way "chosen", specially marked out as having open-ended biodata and thus open-ended destinies. This is what's known as *temporally active* biodata, and oddly enough those posthuman sects who glory in the title of "lesser

species" see it as proof that the Great Houses are actually an inferior, not superior, form of life. The lesser species have a fixed place in the universe. The Houses don't.

In fact this is just one of many increasingly popular theories which hold that the Houses are in some way mere shadows of the lesser species, speculation fuelled by the apparent yet inexplicable links between the Houses and cultures like humanity. The latest of these theories, known as the Younger World Story, is unique in that it seems to have spread even to the Homeworld itself: but it's unlikely that anyone there will ever have the opportunity to mention it and still be held in high esteem.

Biodata unquestionably plays a vital part in the culture of the Great Houses. Although details are usually classified, it's known that many pieces of high-level technology (usually weapons) require the input a certain *type* of biodata before they can be effectively used, almost as if the soldier is being asked to give up a part of him/herself in the name of the War effort. As an agent's biodata can change with every timeship journey, it's even possible that a traveller may suddenly find himself regarded as an incredibly valuable commodity back on the Homeworld, just because his biodata strand suddenly contains material of value. At best this can lead to rapid promotion: at worst, the soldier can find him/herself put into permanent stasis in order to protect this new resource from the ravages of history.

TIME-TRAVEL: POSTHUMAN [*Lesser Species: Technology (Posthuman Period)*] Despite the vast cultural achievements made by posthumanity after the fall of Earth, the posthumans themselves never developed a practical and instinctive form of time-travel as the Great Houses did. Instead, they stole and scavenged the technology wherever they could and modified it in ingenious ways. The history of the posthumans' more decadent faction is full of time-active dilettantes, often forming themselves into groups with names like "the Chrononautical League" or "the Historical Enactment Society", many of them employing the effects of the psychotemporal agent praxis. It was in the early millennia of the hegemony that Mrs. Foyle founded her infamous history-spanning brothel and later the Remonstration Bureau, whose assassins routinely travel through time to carry out their assignments and presumably create any number of anomalies in the process.

Groups such as these were nuisances to the Houses, and it must have irked them that in the Pre-War Era it was the posthumans' praxis techniques which provided the most detailed predictions of how the War might begin [see War Predictions]. More serious still was the fact that posthuman time-travellers were lurking on the battlefields of the War, or even aiding the enemy, in order to steal time-technology. There have even been stories of House exiles or renegades defecting to the posthuman hegemony. There were/are elements in this period of history which would think nothing of decapitating a traveller from the Homeworld on sight, then selling his or her scalp to the Remote, or other factions who prize such trophies.

The real danger, however, lies in the fact that this period of history is *patrolled*. There are instances, quite well-documented even among the security-conscious War-Era Houses, of timeships being repelled from this region of the Spiral Politic and more disturbingly timeships which have disappeared completely, destroyed or captured along with their occupants. Of the five pilots who've disappeared in this way since the outbreak of the War, only one has ever been recovered. The physical husk, abandoned on a barren rock on the edge of posthuman history, had been stripped of all its major organs. It was, incredibly, still alive, at least for the first few hours after its return to the Homeworld. The fate of the timeship was just as grisly, at least from a timeship's point of view. The enemy is generally held

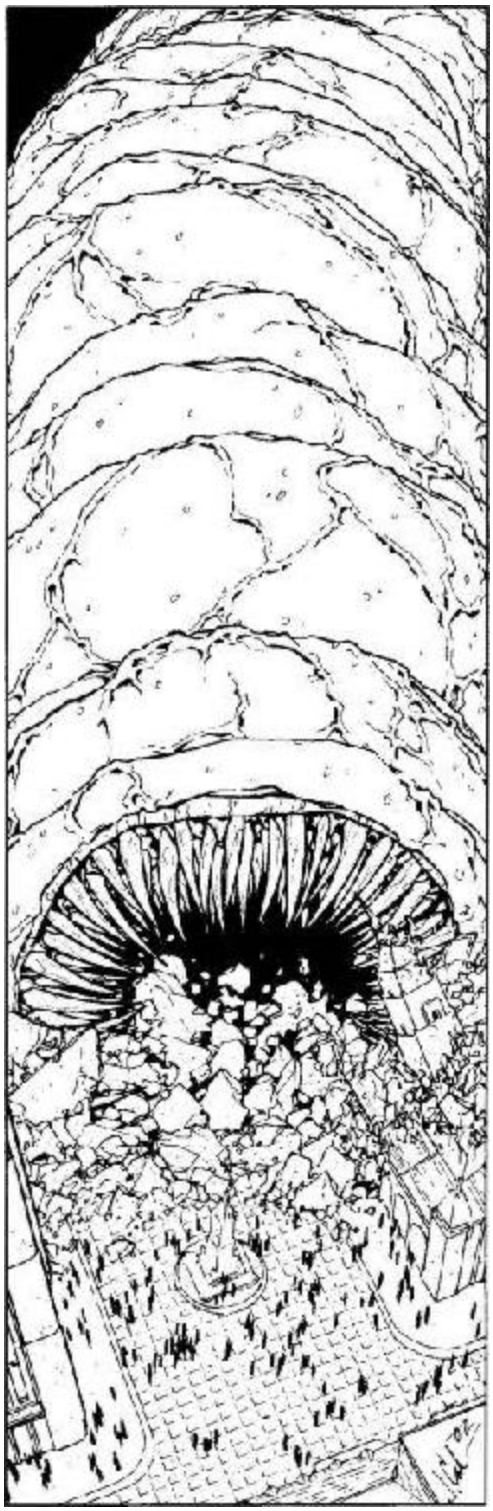
to be responsible, implying that enemy forces may be in full operation beyond the frontier, unseen and unclassified.

It's possible that Faction Paradox has cells operating among the decadents of the posthuman hegemony, where the Faction's traditional activities and demeanour would seem no more outlandish than any other local activity, and where there exists a *carnivalism* which must surely appeal to the Faction's aesthetic. Unlike the Houses, the Faction has no compunction about crossing over into the depths of the posthuman period. The Houses have even accused the Faction of colluding in the scavenging activities of posthuman time-travellers, or of recruiting members from their ranks. The libraries of the Eleven Day Empire suggest a more visceral and trivial motive – the transgressive satisfaction at doing something that the Houses have made almost taboo – and this seems plausible.

But of course, the Faction always has ninety-nine reasons for doing anything and just to know one of them is a blessing.

***THE* TIMEBEAST ASSAULT [*House Military: Event (City of the Saved)*]**
Term used by historians and inhabitants of the City of the Saved to refer to Lady Mantissa's attempt to invade the City in AF 262, by the local calendar.

Allowed to enter the City through the treachery of Lord Mayor Verrifant, the time-ships of House Mirraflex materialised in the heart of the City's Snakefell District, where Mantissa's secret army of citizens loyal to the Great Houses had been demonstrating (ostensibly for the right to use their military augmentations in deadly combat against one another). To kill an inhabitant of the City of the Saved within the limits of the City is, according to conventional wisdom, a physical impossibility. But Mantissa's timeships reconfigured themselves into *behemoths*, great beasts with gaping mouths the size of lower blocks, who began to swallow the citizens whole. Once inside these timebeasts the devoured citizens were in a separate universe, certainly beyond the state-of-grace protecting the City, and were crushed to death in the beasts' bellies. Herded towards the behemoths by their treacherous compatriots, the Great House military machines, the citizens of Snakefell and its surrounding Districts stood little chance of survival.



[[▲ TIMEBEAST ASSAULT.]]

Lady Mantissa had miscalculated, however. She'd rightly perceived that the City prizes the safety of its citizens above all else, but had assumed that,

with its defences breached, the City Council would be powerless to act further to prevent the loss of human life. Furthermore, since no known human or posthuman technology could destroy a timeship, any action they *did* carry out would be of little use. Her intention was that, the timebeasts would continue to devour citizens for years, possibly centuries, until eventually few enough remained for them to be converted into a self-renewing source of organic weaponry. It was known that certain of the more extreme factions within the City – the Last Reich, for instance, and the Forgivable Crusade – had been creating and stockpiling spectacularly useless weapons of mass destruction, presumably against such time as the City's state-of-grace technology might fail. Knowing that the timebeasts were as invulnerable as the citizens, however, Mantissa had discounted any possible use of these weapons. She had forgotten that her opponents were human.

Either the City Councillors (acting independently of the renegade Mayor, and wielding a power they've never demonstrated since), or the Secret Architects, or some other faction in the City, took control of the weapons systems of every extremist faction and launched them in their entirety at the centre of Snakefell District. The instant before the impact occurred, the City's state-of-grace was momentarily disabled. Twenty-million citizens perished, including the resurrected troop's of the House military. The timebeasts, though perfectly intact, were weakened and disorientated. At this point Snakefell District itself was excised from the City altogether, and catapulted back in time to the final moments of the universe. Realising that the ground on which they stood was on a direct collision course with the Big Crunch, most of the pilots were able to extract their timeships from the hurtling suburb. Eleven of them perished.

All those citizens who'd died in the invasion and its genocidal counterblast were re-resurrected within hours. Those citizens who'd sided with the timebeasts were immediately placed under arrest. The site of the excision remains derelict, and the event is commemorated in the annual two-day festival of Verrifant's Night and Little Resurrection Day.

TIMESHIPS [*Great Houses: Participants/Technology/Culture*] To even begin to describe the grace, the complexity, the depth and the importance of the timeships would require volumes. As the standard transportation of the Great Houses, the word "timeships" is generally accepted to be the best English translation even though it hardly seems to do justice to the subtle, multifaceted space-time events (they can only really be thought of as *events* rather than *objects)* which have provided the lynchpin of all House culture and technology for over ten-million years. In fact, the link between the ships and their pilots – both incredibly limited terms, suggesting something merely naval or technological – is so intense that it's commonly said to be a replacement for the Houses' lost sexuality, although this somehow misses the point.

By the time of the anchoring of the thread, when the Houses became truly *Great* and the line between the ruling bloodlines and the universe-in-general began to blur, time-travel was already considered a possibility. The prototype timeships really *were* ships, solid, thrusting, hard-edged devices, punched through the continuum by forced-matter calculation. Only after the anchoring did it become clear that the ships were an irrelevance: the calculations themselves were the important part of the process. The timeships, the first genuine timeships, were modelled space-time events with no armour-plated hulls or military pomposity. They were doorways, vessels which *were* movement rather than *making* movement, if it seems odd that such an elegant, mathematically beautiful construction should be called a "ship", it's best to remember that the translation is one which has mostly been popularised by the much more materialistic War Era.

The attitude of the pilots has changed a great deal in War-time, and given that many of the ships are now recognisable as *people* this shouldn't be surprising. A whole new vocabulary has begun to emerge, not just out of politeness to the timeships. The modern time-ship is literally a different breed to the ships of old. The pilots' connections to their vessels/charges remain strong, but this is possibly the only thing that's remained constant in the move from the old 89-form to the new 103-form entities.

Each breed of timeship is given its own number, as if it were any other piece of hardware, and through this "bestiary" of the ships it's possible to

trace their recent history.

Pre-War (Standard) Timeships

The timeships are, and always have been, intelligent: this has never been in dispute. Such is the complexity of a timeship that without a guiding intelligence, no such construction could ever hold itself together. But a standard timeship's intelligence is distinctly nonlinear, with sequences of time-frames instead of neural pathways, causal probabilities instead of thoughts. This isn't an intelligence which could ever speak, or communicate on any meaningful level, its thoughts so different from those of a biological form that no real meeting of minds would ever be possible. Through both physical controls and a private, almost instinctual link, the pilot can manipulate the timeship well enough to allow movement from one side of the continuum to another, but the fact that there's no linear logic to these journeys (a short trip of one mile often takes longer than a transduction of half a universe) suggests that the ships don't even perceive the physical universe around them the way their occupants do. Claims that the ships are secretly more intelligent than their creators are misleading: their intelligences are so unimaginably different that no comparison is possible, one way or the other. It's doubtful that the ships even understand what "life" is, or why it's supposed to be important.

The essence of a modelled space-time event, with no pretensions at all to being a true vessel, the typical Pre-War timeship (89-form or older) would unquestionably have been a complex device although its existence in the material world would only have been cursory. Much like the earliest generations, these forms weren't really solid objects at all – although all of them could be accessed through a solid, physical portal – but complicated networks of information, spanning dimensions and entwining themselves in the biodata of their passengers. Some have suggested that the older ships were more like "magic doorways" than anything else, and there may be some truth in this. Certainly they' had a life of their own, but to hear them described it's easy to imagine that it was the same sort of life supposedly enjoyed by magical artefacts in folklore, like fairy-tale mirrors that talk in riddles.

The notion of the Pre-War timeships having an overt military' application was, and is, quite ridiculous. Although it would have been *possible* to attach weapons to one of these "magic doorways", it would have been no more useful than attaching weapons to a piece of furniture. These weren't entities designed to operate on a "vulgar" level, or to have any impact on the outside universe at all (the Great Houses were nothing if not discreet, in those days). Even the suggestion that they could be used to transport bombs between locations seemed somehow tasteless when it was first mentioned in the Pre-War years.

90-Form (Military) Timeships

Although the "vulgar" use of timeships in a military context may have been largely pointless, it had long been known that the timeships could be force-engineered for specific military purposes. As a timeship is an event intersecting the Spiral Politic on all manner of levels, it was clear that the information making up a ship would be capable of severely damaging the continuum, if re-ordered correctly. Timeships may have had no reason to carry cannons or battering-rams, but they themselves could be intense time-sundering weapons.

And yet in the Pre-War Era this was never put into practice, and even during the Yssgaroth conflict the full military potential of the ships was never exploited. Why?

The reason could have been an implicit understanding of a timeship's very nature. The ships, runs the theory, have always been intelligent: but intelligent in a way that's unknowable. Thus, to turn an unknowable mind into a devastating instrument of destruction might not be particularly wise. But the War wiped away much of the "softly-softly" anxiety of the Houses, replacing it with an aggressive new demand for heavy weaponry. The first War-designed timeships, timeships which could accurately be called *military*, were finally sanctioned by the Presidency approximately twenty years before the War itself began. The first few saw active service mere days before the initial battle on Dronid, patrolling the perimeter of Dronid's noosphere, marking out the cross-dimensional battlefield of the conflict to come (which led, thanks to the complexities of such things, to most of them being stationed half a universe away from Dronid itself). The

first military timeships were large, graceless and utterly unsubtle, faceless spherical masses whose pilots were groomed to stay neurally linked to the machinery for centuries on end, any physical regeneration in that time "welding" them further into the hardware. These weren't elegant space-time constructions, but siege engines on a truly historical scale, designed to block off routes through time itself by extending their brutal mathematical masses into the universe's causal connections.

But regardless of the ships' appearance, there was never any hint of true hostile action by the 90-forms. There couldn't have been: even now, the idea of a timeship *firing* on a "normal" vessel is frankly ludicrous. That wasn't why these blockade devices were built.

The 101-Project

It had long been suspected that it *might* be possible to engineer a timeship which thought like a living, growing, biological creature. No experiments had ever been performed, however, as the entire concept was simply… unpleasant. Biology was still vaguely repulsive to the Houses, the situation only beginning to change after the rise of groups like Faction Paradox and the suggestion, in the face of the coming apocalypse, that biological breeding on some level might be a wise precaution. A century and a half before the War, the ruling Houses had already sanctioned the production of several machine-hominids – artificial sentients, actual *robots*, previously thought to be too "vulgar" for words – and after that it wasn't long before the obvious suggestion was made.

A new breed of timeship, said the Homeworld's more progressive elements. A timeship which was intelligent, in the biological, hominid sense of the word, a timeship which could communicate and therefore receive orders. The coming War would require troops, and a timeship which was in itself a self-aware unit would have been an agent worth entire armies. However, in principle nobody was sure how to go about creating such a ship. It wasn't possible to simply graft an artificial intelligence onto a Pre-War vessel. A "normal" engineered brain wouldn't understand the more subtle processes holding a timeship's body together, and it was even speculated that no mind could know what a timeship knows *without* becoming so abstract that communication would be impossible. Clearly an entirely new breed of

ship had to be grown, nudged towards hominid communication rather than programmed for it, slowly educated and nurtured as it grew in its cradle. The first attempt at this was known as the 101-Project, the Presidency deciding that an entirely new numbering system would be brought into use with the new breed.

The 101-Project was an infamous failure. Nobody outside the Homeworld could have been shocked. The idea of the Houses "nurturing" a whole new species, when even their own children were force-bred and force-educated, was simply laughable. They knew little of psychology, and cared even less, attempting to steer the 101s course by constantly attacking the craft with heavy-duty biodata waldoes. But at least the first bio-timeship was successfully reared, even if it was never actually going to be controllable.

Almost nine-hundred years earlier, a similar bio-application of technology had been attempted when the Imperator Presidency had sanctioned the breeding of the insane, unstable babels. The pattern now repeated itself, although on an even grander scale. The Houses had repressed their primal heritage for so long that they'd simply forgotten what biology *meant*, so the protean, struggling thing born out of the 101-Project would only have been a surprise to the Houses themselves. As it lay in its cradle of dampers and manipulators, screaming and lashing out with its multiple biodata strands while desperately clawing at nearby time to find some form of escape, it's possible that the technicians started to remember what their culture had spent the last ten-million years trying to suppress.

The 102-Form: Compassion

Today the 101-Project is remembered as the first ever "renegade" timeship. In the 103-age that followed, it wouldn't prove to be the last. The 101 is believed to have been destroyed soon after its creation, and not without a great deal of difficulty. The ruling Houses, shaken by the monstrosity, suspended the project and instead focused on the potential of the *next* possible form of timeship.

There was, is and always will be only one 102-form ship. Her name is Compassion, and she's become a kind of legend in the minds of many War-interested parties, partly because of the huge technological shift she represented but mostly because she was the first War participant to utterly

ignore the authority of the Great Houses and get away with it. The stories of her exploits are legion.

In fact Compassion was created by accident. Originally a member of the Remote, and a former human colonist operating under the name of Laura Tobin, she became the only known member of the Remote race to have encountered (and been a guest of) an antique Pre-War timeship. Details of this period lack scientific explanation, many stories involving a variety of peculiar misadventures, but the Remote signal-receiver hooked into Compassion's neural system seems to have channelled the complex forced-matter functions of the timeship straight into Compassion herself. As the time-ship was purely a modelled space-time event, there's a certain logic in the notion that Compassion herself might have been re-modelled in its image. All that's known for certain is that by the end of the process, she was, in herself, the first recorded biological/timeship hybrid.

(Culturally speaking there are some interesting aspects to this story, not least the fact that it sounds so much like a modern-day *crucible myth*. Compassion was apparently the receptacle, the receiver into which the essences of three cultures – the Great Houses, Faction Paradox, and humanity – were poured, producing an almost messiah-like fusion of mortal, god and angel. This isn't to say that the story is *untrue*, of course, but it's easy to see why it appeals. As Compassion herself was ostensibly born during the War Era, and somehow became involved in the events of the Pre-War Era in spite of the Protocols of Linearity, her association with an old-fashioned time-ship also comes across as a synthesis of past, present and future.)

All 103-form timeships are thought to be descended from Compassion, even if the details of the breeding programme remain confidential. It's believed that she originally defied the wishes of the ruling Houses simply because she anticipated – probably rightly – her use in a forced-breeding programme, not only a personal violation but an involvement in a War which didn't interest her at all. If she went to the Homeworld on her own terms, it's never been disclosed what those terms might have been.

No attempts to replicate the 102-form, by exposing other Remote members to timeship signals, have met with anything more useful than odd spinal

patterns and facial mutations in the test subjects. The myth of Compassion would seem to suggest that the timeship she encountered had an unusual disposition towards humanity, but perhaps it's more accurate to say that she was a true product of her times. Even now, her name is inexorably linked with the story of the way the War began.

Familiars

In the period when Compassion was still reluctant to deal with the Houses, and while the 101 debacle was still fresh in the minds of the ruling Houses, several House technologists began to suggest a more gradual method of engendering a sentient timeship. Their recommendation was that the Houses should attempt to create units with more rudimentary intelligences, akin to those of higher animals, instead of diving headlong into hominid-type consciousness. The request was quietly approved by House Dvora, and the technicians set to work creating what soon became known as *familiar*s (possibly another sign of the mysticism creeping into Pre-War House culture, although the word may have a different resonance in the closed world of the ships specialists).

The experiments were relatively successful, and within the first year's breeding-period the technicians had created ten of the animal time-ships, held by a secure field to a minor abandoned world in close historical proximity to the Homeworld. Timeships generally require pilots, but the familiars were never intended to be working models, simply the base from which the technicians could work towards their goal. They were vivisection subjects above all else. On some primal level, however, the ships themselves seemed to *understand* their need for pilot-bonding and broke through the inner chain of defences. The beasts stalked their way through the experimental facility, one by one swallowing the House technicians whole before disappearing into the continuual strata.

Yet even so, the familiars are now generally regarded as a success. Whereas the 101-form is remembered as a potential threat to civilisation – and, worse, a potential threat with no real military application – the familiar project yielded immediate results, despite the apparent loss of both technicians and subjects. The priming protocols developed in the tests are still used in the rearing of 103 forms, even if the breeding method is vastly

different. Sub-sentient timeships aren't a major threat to the Houses' sense of security, although in truth the ruling Houses now like to believe that the constructs managed to destroy themselves after their escape. Even so there have been sightings in the field of a lady and a tiger, walking side by side. She strokes the tiger's fur, whispers in its ear, and the tiger gulps down her body before vanishing altogether.

It may not be coincidental that a similar double act is known to be employed by one of the leading assassination bureaux from the age of posthumanity.

103-Form (Hominid-Sentient) Timeships

In the current War Era most timeships involved in active service are of the 103-form, the descendants of Compassion and the first true generation of vehicles which can be described as sentient in ways other species can understand. In fact, the default form of these timeships is a perfectly human one (although, with enough preparation, they can transform themselves into the likeness of any roughly human-sized being). The 103s are agents in themselves, a walking, talking, reasoning omni-species whose bodies also happen to be "magic doorway" conduits across the continuum. Perhaps the greatest indication of this change in their nature is the fact that the 103s are armed, not in the sense of being time-bulkheads like the 90s but in the sense that they carry all manner of "vulgar" weapons inside themselves. Unlike all previous generations, the 103s are designed for operations *within* the material universe.

But despite being individuals, with individual personalities and even "genetic" quirks caused by deliberate mutagenic factors in the breeding process, every timeship still has its pilot: a companion more than a captain, an agent of the Houses who'll generally make his home inside the timeship's internal spaces (the sight of a pilot disappearing into his associate is never exactly pleasant). A cynic would argue that this is because the Houses still refuse to completely trust the ships, and insist on having them constantly monitored and neurally-linked. A different kind of cynic might point out that as the pilots' main function is to perform maintenance on their vessels, it's the timeships who insist on being accompanied by their organic drones.

But in fairness, the strong (and increasingly intimate) link between ship and pilot may have a far more fundamental basis. When the ships were incapable of communication, they were used by the Houses as anchors in the outside universe, points of safety from which the pilots could explore the hazardous areas beyond the Homeworld's protection. But now the process works both ways. The ships still provide an anchor for the pilots, and as the ships themselves are now exploring the Spiral Politic for themselves – finally experiencing, and understanding, the material universe – the pilots are *their* anchors in the *political* continuum. Without the pilots the ships would have no context, no matrix for social understanding, no way of maintaining their personalities.

The exact details of 103-breeding are classified to this day, but it's certain that the help of Compassion is no longer required. 103s are now mated with bull-engines in order to produce new 103s, though the breeding hasn't yet produced anything sufficiently different to be deemed a 104. Among the cradle-engineers of the Great Houses it's generally thought to be just a matter of time, and this notion of raw, uncontrolled evolution has caused more anxiety on the Homeworld than anybody might have guessed. Especially as there's the implicit understanding, in everything that's ever been made public about the breeding programme, that the 103 are *not* as powerful or as impressive as Compassion herself… suggesting that the Houses have deliberately handicapped their creations. So what recidivist 102-"genes", the anxious ask themselves, might be reactivated in the next generation?

91-Form Timeships: The Ships of War

Today, the 91-forms are the only standard (i.e. non-hominid-sentient) timeships still being produced on the Homeworld. Indeed, apart from a few retrograde units they're the only non-hominid timeships left in service. The prototypes were produced in the years immediately before the War, while the 101-Project was busy falling apart and the enemy was practically breathing down the necks of the cradle-technicians. Although not recognisably intelligent, there's a definite biological edge to these vessels. Not that they're made out of organic matter, of course, but the inclusion of minimum-intensity biodata to the structures suggests that they're at least *aware* of life on their pilots' level.

It's not just their quasi-living feel that marks out the 91s as different. In the past timeships were designed to be discreet, to be doorways or cabinets which could quietly plant themselves in any space or time without attracting attention. The 91s, by contrast, were designed to have a *presence*. Though their forms can be re-grown at the insistence of the pilots, and though the ships themselves are constantly evolving their event boundaries to give themselves more efficient manifestations, the size of these vessels remains consistently large. They're the behemoths of the timeship world, not necessarily more powerful than the previous generations but built to make themselves known wherever they go. Essentially they're the first true Ships of War, the products of a culture which no longer cares about discretion and which, on some level, feels determined to send that message to the rest of the universe. The monstrosities used during House Mirraflex's assault on the City of the Saved were 91-form variations.

Big, bulky and unapologetic, many 91-form timeships have been encountered by lesser species in gross planetary orbit, where they've often been mistaken for "banal" ships: great arks, perhaps, or the glittering, intimidating flagships of one of the independent warmongering species. But space is hardly their natural environment. On planets they tend to root themselves at ground level, to push aside buildings and take the forms of great cathedrals, embassies for the Great Houses. Those which have been incapacitated and abandoned have occasionally been dug out of the ground, millions of years in the localised future, misidentified by the natives as either relics of a lost civilisation or the bones of huge, semi-mechanical monsters. Those pilots who choose to emphasise the organic, ever-changing nature of the ships (and it's a common trend, now that the perversity of biological reproduction is being accepted even by the ruling Houses) sometimes command the 91s to manifest themselves as things which almost seem alive. These are the ships of the bombastic and the arrogant, so it's no surprise that some of the more aristocratic bloodlines should build entire internal architectures based on the pilots' own biorhythms or cellular structures.

It's the kind of obsessive, self-fixated behaviour that always takes place in wartime. Pilots of the Pre-War timeships might be shocked by the lack of decorum displayed by these new creations, and even though it's certainly

possible for the 91s to appear *beautiful* a traditionalist would still hold that if the ships are to regain their lost character, then hope lies with the 104s rather than the gross macro-engineering of the 91s.

***FATHER* TIMON [*Faction Paradox: Participant (City of the Saved)*]**
Faction Paradox initiate of partial human extraction, originally recruited from the City of the Saved. His history is a complex one. Originally (1398 – 1426 AD) a resident of Hamborn village in Devon, England, Robin Wright was born severely deformed, hunchbacked with lightly-scaled skin and cranial peculiarities. Although mentally able he became the scapegoat of the village, constantly harassed, teased and even tortured. The villagers tolerated him only because his dexterity and mechanical inventiveness were useful in building and agricultural work, although they also led to accusations of witchcraft. Eventually burned at the stake at the age of 28, Robin might reasonably have expected better treatment in Heaven.

Unfortunately, after his resurrection in the City of the Saved he encountered humans from other eras who were well aware what his deformities meant. His mother had been affected by the fallout of the War, more specifically exposed to the regen-inf excitants used by the Great Houses when reconstructing human subjects as House Military agents. It seems unlikely that she might have been literally impregnated by an augmented agent, as regen-inf units are formatted for sterility, but traces of House biological tissue have a habit of surviving their hosts' bodies and it's at least feasible that a woman in the early stages of pregnancy could have assimilated the regen-inf protocols into her unborn child. In War terms Robin would have been designated a mechanic, reconstructed and neurologically primed for assembly duties. Yet the City doesn't acknowledge its half-human denizens as full citizens, and Robin found himself once again an outcast, despised and rejected.

For years Robin lived in squalor in Amity District, one of the City's most notorious slums, surrounded by petty thieves, whores and part-humans, earning paltry favours by his innate skill with mechanisms. Considering the political aspirations of House Halfling to be beyond plausibility, Robin was eventually discovered by a Faction Paradox Mission in the City which soon recognised his potential. After a decade as a field agent, recruiting for the Faction among the part-human underclasses, Robin became initiated as a full Cousin and took the name Timon. He was relocated to the Eleven-Day Empire itself, where he rose to a position of some respect within the weapons research cabals.

Killed in a skirmish with a rebellious Remote faction in 4178 AD, Cousin Timon was resurrected *again* in the City of the Saved – at the very beginning of its history, simultaneous with his original resurrection – whereupon he immediately contacted the Faction. He returned to the Eleven-Day Empire and resumed his former duties: it was his own information which led the Mother of the Faction Mission to discover and recruit his younger self in the first place, and the apparently preternatural abilities of the Godmother of the Rump Parliament may well stem from Timon's accounts of later City history.

Now 118 subjective years old, and recently promoted to membership of the Parliament, Father Timon is, as far as is known, the only individual to have inhabited the City of the Saved in *two* lifetimes… although presumably, as Faction Paradox becomes more involved in the City's affairs the phenomenon will be more frequently observed.

TIRGOVISTE [*Lesser Species: Location (Earth, C15)*] One-time capital of the Eastern European province of Wallachia, and in the fifteenth century the site of the first provable contact between humanity and the War Era factions. Historically, it's well-known that in 1461 over 23,000 Turks were impaled on sharpened branches outside the city, a strategy devised by Wallachia's *voivode*-prince to drive away the army of the Turkish Sultan advancing from the Danube. It's also been suggested that as the *voivode* had been partly educated by the Order of the Dragon, there may (if only subconsciously) have been an element of ceremonial sacrifice in the atrocity. But if the crucial factor in human sacrifice is how people *react* to it, then it's useful to focus on how the people of Tirgoviste dealt with the carnage on their doorsteps.

With the "Forest of the Impaled" in position, the smell within the city's defences would have been beyond belief. It's recorded that delusional fits were common among the locals, for obvious reasons: it's impossible for any stable human mind to witness that level of carnage, within plain sight and for days on end, without entering a dissociated state which may even border on the trancelike. The fear of Turkish invasion (and, indeed, the fear of the sadistic *voivode* himself) seems to have declined a little during this period, the populace almost becoming serene – perhaps *shell-shocked* – in the face of the holocaust around them. The more delicate inhabitants were said to have become "possessed" or "visionary", which, given the era, may simply mean that they began to hallucinate. There are frequent accounts of delusional, blank-faced cityfolk who couldn't tell the living from the dead or even tell other members of the peasantry apart, seeing the same gaping faces on their fellow men and women that they'd seen on the corpses in the Forest. If all ritual is a form of conditioning, then perhaps the slaughter really *was* a kind of rite, which caused the entire city to see nothing but death all around it. Some had difficulty even separating night from day.

The accounts of hallucinations and/or visions can in fact be plotted on a map of fifteenth-century Tirgoviste, and from such a map it becomes clear that certain areas were more prone to delusion than others. The points where "walking death" was actually *seen* can be charted almost as if they were weather-patterns, and that's hardly surprising. Human beings

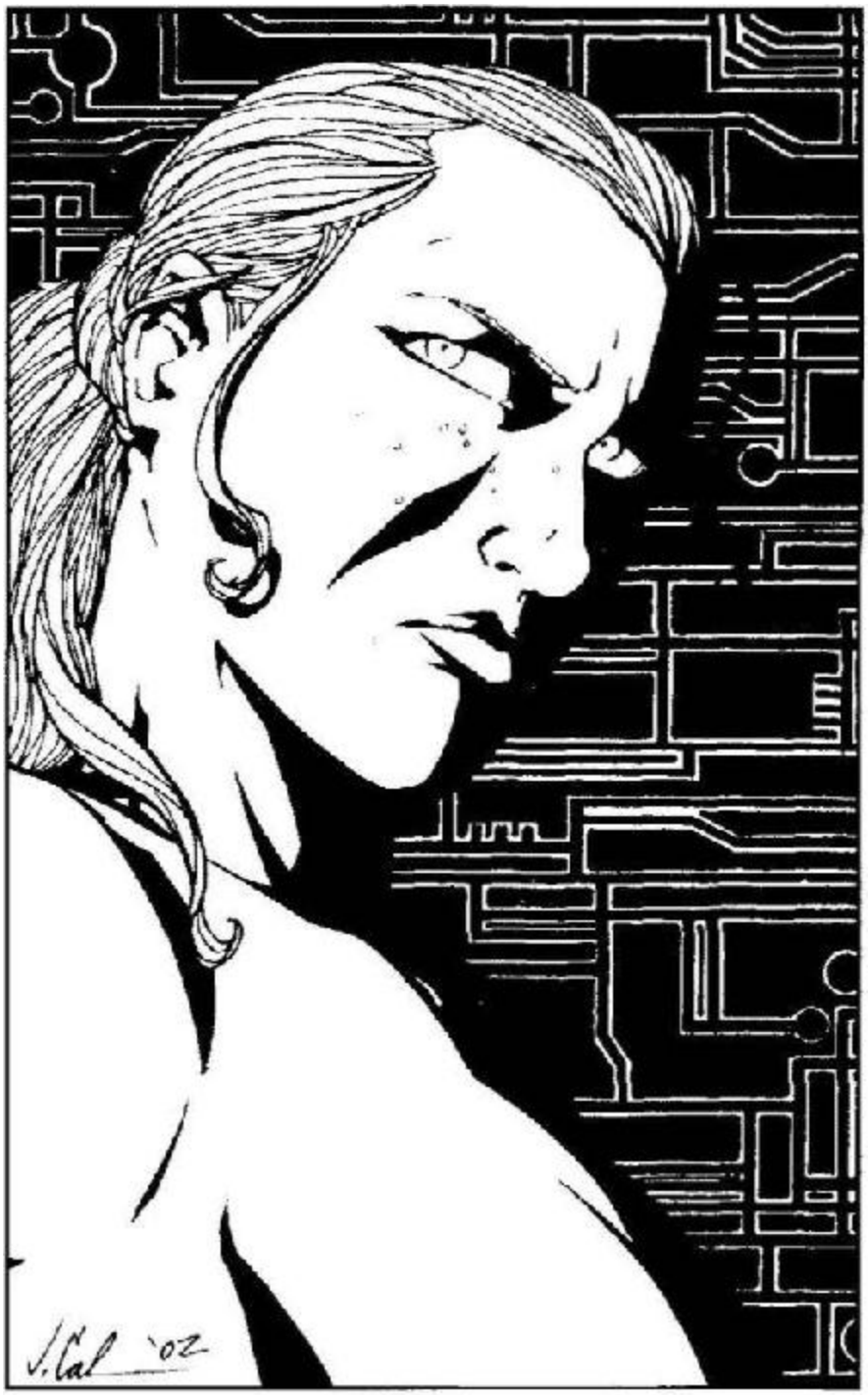
respond more strongly to smell than to any other sense, so as the wind carried the stench of the corpses through the city it would undoubtedly have triggered more of the hallucinations wherever it went. If the *voivode* was indeed looking for patterns of order via human suffering, then this was the form those patterns took, and in many accounts entire sections of the city are described as if they were extensions of the Forest of the Impaled itself. The *voivode's* local palace was said to be built on the bodies of the dead and dying: in this case the description doesn't seem to be metaphorical. More significantly, witnesses casually referred to the 'carvings' of the city as if those carvings had always been there. Historians have generally accepted that the awkward, predatory sculptures described in the two most famous accounts were either delusions or exaggerations. It's odd, though, that they were reported by members of the peasantry who never would have seen the gargoyles on the walls of great cities like Prague or Paris.

Though it'd still be a while before any of the War Era factions would fully make their presence felt on Earth, these descriptions obviously suggest that the city was being touched upon by one of the ulterior worlds. The effect on the *voivode* himself was just as great as the effect on his countrymen, although while his subjects quickly bowed their heads to the horror he seems to have been determined to make himself the master of it. The Turkish army had already turned around and marched back to Constantinople, yet even so the prince apparently felt the city to be under siege, or perhaps simply cut off from the rest of the world. For him, the patterns of the dead outside the city formed a definite boundary.

Perhaps he even attempted to divine the future from the "slaughter patterns" on the wind, and if so then he may have known that Wallachia would soon fall to the Sultan's followers no matter what.

***LAURA* TOBIN [*Remote: Participant (Pre-War Era)*]** Original human name of the individual eventually known as Compassion, the first (and so far only) human/timeship hybrid. Created under extreme circumstances, huge gaps exist in Tobin's story after her metamorphosis and many question-marks still hang over her "adventures" while on the run from the Great Houses, though the process by which she became the hybrid is notoriously well-documented.

Laura Tobin was originally a human colonist on Ordifica, one of the many worlds whose mass-media was infiltrated by Faction Paradox in the early days of the Remote project, although she was later moved after Ordifica fell to the crusades of the House Military's second Wave. Tobin, like all the Remote, was neurologically hardwired into the colony's media-system: every Remote agent was a living, breathing receiver, biologically primed to accept signals from any source. The Remote reproduced in the remembrance tanks, regrowing themselves with every generation, every re-birth increasing their capacity for receiving and interpreting transmissions on the most obscure deep-level frequencies. The Faction's original aim had been to turn the Remote into super-adaptable shock troops, and yet by the end of the genocidal Second Wave the Faction's lines of communication had been so badly severed that soon Tobin's colony had no real contact with its founders at all.



▲ **COMPASSION**, *formerly Laura Tobin.*

But by escaping the Faction, the Remote had escaped linearity and become divorced from the War itself. It was at this point in time, as the colony finally became independent, that Tobin fell into the company of a timeship from the Pre-War era: a non-hominid-sentient vessel, but still one with a

definite consciousness of its own. The ship must have been fascinated by this woman, who'd been re-modelled so many times by technologies not unlike those found within the time-ships themselves, and who had knowledge of the future War which in the timeship's own era hadn't even begun. Tobin, with no real roots left in the universe and nothing better to do, must have welcomed her recruitment into the ship's crew as a welcome distraction.

But a timeship is a complex web of bio-mathematics and higher order technologies, and every part of its mass constantly transmits signals to every other part, not only communications and maintenance signals but signals which re-model matter itself within the ship's environs. Did the timeship know that Tobin, as an nth-generation product of the Remote project, would be able to receive these signals at the level of her own biodata? Did it realise that with every day she spent in its presence, she'd begin to think, reason, even *re-form* herself just like a timeship would? It's tempting to think so. If true, then the ship – a model never particularly loyal to the Great Houses, but nonetheless concerned for the Homeworld's welfare – may have "narrowcast" its programming to Tobin in a deliberate attempt to create the first hominid-sentient timeship. The Homeworld was already on a War footing thanks to the Umbaste administration, and the possibility of such a 102-form timeship had frequently been discussed.

Now Laura Tobin had become the crucible. Human by birth, rebuilt by Faction hardware and primed by the timeship, she was a unique blend of biological and technological influences whose very lifespan crossed the future of the War Era with the present of the Houses. The old timeship died soon after, perhaps knowing that it had done its work. Compassion (a name Tobin had used even as one of the Remote, originally a somewhat ironic nickname given Tobin's pragmatic nature, but now an official designation) seems to have received her final programming from the old ship even as it passed away. Her given human name hasn't been used since, except in the fictionalised version of her adventures written by Carmen Yeh.

TOWER HILL [*Faction Paradox: Location (Eleven-Day Empire)*]
Located outside the boundaries of Westminster, on the edge of the City of London, in the "shadow" capital of the Eleven-Day Empire, Tower Hill is a lodestone for the forces which rule the land beyond Faction Paradox's jurisdiction.

The Unkindnesses are based here, normally congregating around the white mound at the epicentre of the hill, beneath which Bran the Blessed's head – the head of one of the founders of Britain – is said to be buried. Tower Hill was once one of the three sites of druidic power in the pre-Roman Thames valley, and there's some speculation that it was at this point the site began to attract practices of blood-sacrifice. Throughout the bloody history of the islands, Tower Hill was the chosen place to kill traitors. It seems odd, then, that its equivalent in the Eleven-Day Empire isn't under the control of Faction Paradox.

Yet the City of London has always maintained a certain autonomy from the rule of the land. Various Kings through the Middle Ages were forced to allow the City, as symbolised by Tower Hill and the bounds of the Roman Wall, to be ruled by its own men and not from the political city of Westminster. By setting themselves up in the New Palace of Westminster the elders of Faction Paradox became allied to the politics of the State, not the City, and as such hold no jurisdiction over it or over the Unkindnesses.

***HOUSE* TRACOLIX [*Great Houses*: *Ruling House*]** Whenever significant changes occur in a society, there'll be a group operating just below the ruling strata keen to take advantage of them. It matters very little whether this substrata is revolutionary, middle class, or composed of the disgruntled scions of the lesser aristocracy. What matters is that it's hungry, zealous and original. The hunger may be purely metaphorical; the zeal misguided; the original thought a hodge-podge of half-baked mysticism and impractical ideology, but so much the better. Such groups are almost never actually successful in forming a better or more stable society, yet they *disturb*. They *catalyse*. They ape their betters even as they deny that they have any betters, and by mimicry they bring down what they seek to replace.

Among the lesser species, the agents of House Tracolix range oddly from perfumed fops to thugs in dinner jackets who fret about the correct presentation of cocktails. The House's recklessness has been widely noted, its members on the Homeworld regarded in many circles as arrogant Newbloods, fashion-conscious upstarts who only aspired to the ranks of the ruling Houses through their constant ambition and go-get-'em attitude. Or perhaps it's more accurate to say they succeeded because they mirrored the era so well: the War Era, a period of rapid, distressing change and a sudden urge to *move*. Few established Houses have ever been so prepared to adopt the inventions and fashions of the lesser species, or to take on human retainers (though never on the Homeworld itself), more out of boredom than because they see any value in culture beyond the Houses.

Those Houses who think of themselves as being built to last have suggested that it won't be long before Tracolix falls flat on its face, but its fall is a matter for concern even among those who detest these smug young Newbloods. What, the feeling seems to be, will be brought to light in the wake of their passing? What will the *new* Newbloods put on their standards, that might once again cause the old Houses to flinch? After all, Tracolix's members may be disturbingly modern but at least they're not terribly dangerous…

ULTERIOR WORLDS [*Celestis: Culture/Technology*] The most difficult thing for nonparticipants to understand about the War is just how unimportant *places* are. It's well-known that when the Great Houses talk of "worlds" they're not referring to planets but to spheres of influence, with a continent, or city, or even building qualifying as a "world" if it has enough significance on the map of the Spiral Politic. It's similarly well-known that the physical distances between worlds are irrelevant to the Houses, and that the true paths between them are the paths of causality. But perhaps the best example of the unimportance of distance is the Celestis' home-realm of Mictlan.

All worlds have a noosphere, a sphere of what's *known* about the world, in the same way that a planet will have a geosphere of rock and a biosphere of life. But the Celestis are idea-lords in an idea-kingdom. Mictlan is nothing but a noosphere, and has no real matter, living or non-living, to support its mass. Although it's commonly said to rest on the outer skin of the universe, a point from which the Celestis can watch the Spiral Politic like embittered and (supposedly) uninvolved gods, in truth this "bubble" on the continuum is merely a focus: a lens, perhaps, through which the true landscape of Mictlan can be viewed. Alone of all the known worlds, Mictlan is *spread* throughout the universe, part of it existing wherever the Celestis themselves are understood.

This has led many to suggest that Mictlan is proof of the Celestis' impotence. Even their home domain exists as nothing more than a ghost, skulking in the cracks of the Spiral Politic.

Nonetheless, like all ghosts Mictlan can be summoned, made larger and more distinct just by the correct application of symbols (symbols *are* understanding, so it makes sense that an idea-realm can be made stronger by them in the same way that an idea can be made more tangible by words on a page). As the Celestis are terrified of their own mortality and dependent on the thoughts of the dead for their continued survival, it's no surprise that the symbols used to provoke Mictlan are consistently morbid.

The first true contact between Earth and the War Era powers was in 1461, when the mass-slaughter of over 23,000 Turks outside the Eastern European city of Tirgoviste made a connection between the city and the

edge of Mictlan's noosphere. There's evidence that Vlad III – the *voivode*-prince responsible for the atrocity, already steeped in blood despite being only thirty years of age – felt some form of ritual urge while he arranged the Turkish bodies for display. Not that the Celestis were in any way responsible for his frame of mind: the prince's drives were largely sadistic and paranoid-schizophrenic. But the Celestis themselves are in part modelled on the behaviour of the lesser species, at least in their god-forms, and the prince was only repeating patterns inspired by the intricacies of the human nervous system… the same patterns which the Celestis had taken from their servants, and used to fashion the outer edges of Mictlan.

The result was the creation of an outpost, a suburb, an *ulterior world*, between Tirgoviste's (small) noosphere and Mictlan itself. Thus was the first contact made.

***ACADEMICIAN* UMBASTE [*Great Houses: Participant (Pre-War Era)*]**
Former head of the Presidency of the Great Houses, who immediately preceded the War King as nominal leader of House society, he was nominated as acting head during his predecessor's Faraway Declaration, and he, more than anyone, was surely appalled when the position became a permanent one.

Never intended to take office, Umbaste could only charitably be called a yes-man. He had little or no will of his own, and was rumoured never even to speak during meetings of the ruling Houses, except at the urging of the War King. Although Umbaste was technically at the heart of the Presidency, nobody (least of all Umbaste himself) had any illusions as to who was really in charge. Indeed it was immediately after Umbaste's inauguration that the ruling Houses hurriedly installed the War King as a member of their higher assembly, and it was him to whom they looked for guidance. Any members who'd entertained any fantasies of adhering to the old Presidency's policies had been disabused of the idea by their previous ruler's hideous downfall. The War King quickly shared the defensive and weapons protocols he'd been preparing for the previous four decades, and in this last period before the War work finally began on the founding of a truly efficient House militia. It s true to say while the War King is responsible for the form, size, and style of today's House Military more than any other individual, many of the actual reforms in technique were actually implemented during Umbaste's "administration".

Evidently tired of being a puppet ruler, Umbaste attempted to exercise the privileges to which he was (technically) entitled. Without giving any warning to his peers, he visited the site of the caldera, the point on the surface of the Homeworld generally thought to be a "real-world analogue" for the exact centre of causality. This is considered a perilous location in itself: the caldera is a node point, where all lines of historical influence converge, and with their in-built connection to time it's impossible for a member of one of the Houses to approach the site without suffering some minor ill effects. But Umbaste approached *defenceless*, dropping the bio-imprimaturs which protect House agents from deeptime phenomena and opening his biodata to the caldera. Theoretically there's nothing in the Protocols to prevent a member of the elite assembly doing such a thing (it's

thought to be a potential way of gaining insights into future events, if an erratic one), yet it's doubtful that the War King would have allowed Umbaste to go through with it had he been warned in advance.

For an entire year Umbaste remained within a fugue-state, his body little more than a husk, his biodata no longer rooted in the soil of the Homeworld and his psyche lost somewhere in the meta-structure of history. Eventually he re-surfaced, although all he could say was a single word, over and over. The word in question is open to English interpretation, but when stripped of its time-active connotations it's usually rendered as: 'One.'

After several days of this, he finally regained enough of his faculties to disintegrate himself.

***THE* UNKINDNESSES [*Faction Paradox: Participants*]** Prophetic creatures living on Tower Hill, at the edge of the Eleven Day Empire. Many unlikely and implausible animal forms are said to live in the wildernesses of "lost time" beyond the New Palace of Westminster and Faction Paradox's jurisdiction, but the Unkindnesses are the only ones whose existence is provable. The renowned Faction cryptozoologist Father Stendec refused to classify the entities on Tower Hill, preferring only to advise people to afford them all respect and never visit them empty-handed 'lest you return empty-headed'. The renegade Cousin Anastasia is said to have once offered them a Siberian firebird as payment for their prophesies. Any such augury should be taken with a certain amount of distrust, however, since the Unkindnesses also have a reputation for trickery, or obscurity at the very least. It's certainly curious that although they demand the carcass of an animal before they can predict the future, they often refuse to eat the flesh they're offered, despite their obvious connection to the carrion-eating birds which also inhabit Tower Hill.

[[▲ THE UNKINDNESSES.]]

So far, their manner and name suggest a twist on the Greek *Eumenides* (lit. “The Kindly Ones”) or the Roman Furies. Indeed one Faction myth

surrounding the Unkindnesses reinforces this, by suggesting that they were engendered by the drops of blood which fell as the Grandfather of House Paradox cut off one arm in the famous Act of Severance. Of course, rather like the myths of King Arthur, if the founder of House Paradox had visited *every* location where "Grandfather traces" are said to be found then there would have been no time to create the Faction in the first place, alter-time or no alter-time.

However, the Unkindnesses – which are clearly winged, just as the Eumenides were, share more of their mythology with the Tower Hill ravens. In the original London it was said that the British nation would stand until the ravens left Tower Hill: to ensure that they stayed, in later years the birds' wings were clipped. Should the Unkindnesses leave the Tower Hill of the Eleven-Day Empire, then will Faction Paradox fall? It seems unlikely that any agents of the Faction have tried to clip *these* wings.

UPTIME GATE [*Lesser Species: Location/Technology (City of the Saved)*] The only known entrance to the City of the Saved, the human enclave which exists beyond the end of universal history. The Gate takes the form of an excessively powerful time corridor, linking the City to a point in the universe whose temporal location, by accident or design, is almost precisely that of the far-future "frontier in time" beyond which few representatives of the time-active cultures are willing to venture [see also Time-Travel: Posthuman]. Strictly speaking the Uptime Gate is the City terminus of the corridor, but by convention the Frontier terminus is also referred to by this name. A literal gate of vast size, surmounted by an enormous arch-shaped fortress, the terminal is rather ostentatiously located at the summit of a mountain on an otherwise irrelevant world in one of posthumanity's causal systems. A substantial community – including local inhabitants in the City's direct employ – has grown up upon the slopes of the mountain, providing docks, bazaars, support facilities and (it's rumoured) powerful dimensional baffles for the benefit of the Gate's visitors. It's even feasible that this cosmopolitan society might have been an influence on the posthuman capital of Siloportem.

Since travel through the Gate proper is controlled from the City itself, attacking it confers no strategic advantage and would very likely bring unnecessary reprisals. At the Gate terminus a state of enforced truce therefore exists between time-active cultures, even between agents of the Great Houses and representatives of the enemy side. It's suspected that the location of the terminal isn't accidental, and may imply detente, or even alliance, between the City and whatever forces patrol the "frontier". Although passage through the Gate is closely monitored, there seems to be an increasing feeling within some parts of the City itself – particularly among supporters of new-generation speakers like Amanda Legend Lefcourt – that the City should be more open to the influence of the universe proper, or indeed, even begin resurrecting the dead of *other* species apart from humanity.

It's worth noting that as well as the Uptime Gate, the City sports more conventional North, South, East and West Gates, all of which open onto the meaningless non-void of non-space, and so apparently exist for aesthetic or symbolic reasons (or simply to provide arbitrary compass points). Some

historians have suggested that the Uptime Gate must have a Downtime counterpart. If so – and no visitor to the City has been able to confirm this – then the activities of the citizens in the universe *after* this one must remain a matter of speculation, and probably concern.

UTTERLOST [*House Military: Location (World)*] Fifty years into the War, many strategists now think of confusion as being; a tangible thing, a way of gauging the tangle of history caused by constantly re-fought time-active battles. If this is so, then Utterlost is the universal capital of that confusion.

Utterlost is a colony noted for being the site of one of the most re-fought time assaults, the local timeline having been re-written so often that virtually no trace exists of the "original" version and it's difficult to tell *whose* colony the world might have been in the first place. It's now impossible to approach the world using normal techniques, as every available microsecond in the crucial battle-window has already been filled by the complex interweave of attacking and counterattacking forces, in several iterations. Time has even been *added* to Utterlost, in attempt to open up new routes into the world's history – yet another use for the temporal substance known as zero time – but even the expanded parts of the timeline have since become intractable. It's presumed that life on the surface continues, as every actual extrusion of the War into real-time has so far been countered by a retroactive annulment. However, this remains conjectural.

An attempt to drop House agents in stasis capsules into the world's far past, with a view to them living through the battle period and reporting back after its conclusion, has also been unsuccessful. Why remains unclear. Possibly the enemy has thought of the same thing, and the two forces of agents have already wiped each other out.

VACCINATIONS *(TEMPORAL)* [*House Military: Technology*] The principle of vaccination, independently discovered on many worlds, is simple enough: a small amount of something dangerous is taken so as to build up an inherent defence against greater doses. Indeed, the principle is so inherently "magical" – having so many symbolic, totemic undertones – that it rapidly generates spin-off pseudolitries, ranging from the homeopathic (an even smaller dose of something is even better for you) to the legends of various folk-heroes who build up immunities to every known poison.

A parallel discovery is that it's possible to inoculate against time. Biological entities are steeped in time, moment by moment: but it's possible for House technology to bend the first strands of an agent's timeline out of their native environment, and into another part of history altogether, just as in mythology Achilles' mother dipped him in the stream of invulnerability. This early subliminal contact with a different time-frame has been shown to considerably reduce the sense of shock when an agent is first deployed to a different field of history, and to lessen the effect of any retro-attacks on his or her primary point of origin (that point of origin being, as it were, "spread" between the native world and the adopted world).

This procedure was discovered after a series of far more basic experiments, including the *Jungle Children* research of House Arpexia. Agents vaccinated by this process retain an unusual mixed biodata structure, and are sometimes disparagingly referred to as hybrids, but their long-term success in the field remains unquestioned even if a question mark remains over their mental stability in the even *longer-term*. The notion of temporal vaccination is now becoming fashionable on the Homeworld, the Houses realising that as so little of the damage done by the War is truly *material* a new strain of biodata-protection must be essential. If there was ever a time when the Houses could rely on purely physical cures – such as the often-ridiculous "autonomic killerbots" – then those days are long gone.

***THE BATTLE OF* VALENTINE'S DAY [*Faction Paradox: Event (Early War Era)*]** The final battle between the Eleven-Day Empire and the rogue Thirteen-Day Republic, in which Faction Paradox decisively squashed the malcontents and brought the Republic's founder Anastasia to "justice".

Why would an organisation like Faction Paradox, commonly held to venerate disruption and dissent above ail else, want to prevent the establishment of a group even *more* committed to rejecting the Great Houses and the order they epitomise? Put simply, the signs were appearing all over the Eleven Day Empire: a second area of "lost" time wouldn't be tolerated by the *loa*. At first there was some resistance to the idea of an attack, some of the elders feeling that the Thirteen-Day Republic might be useful as a distraction. Let the enemy go after the Republic, they argued, stretching its resources and leaving it weakened enough for the Faction proper to gain the advantage. The messages were clear, though, in the bones thrown, the cards drawn and the flesh under the tracking-knife. The Republic had to go.

Cousin Octavia led the attack, using her knowledge of Anastasia's methods from their time in the field together. She must also have known that her former compatriot was being guided by prophesies and rantings of the ex-Father Dyavol. She used ritual protocol to disguise her five hundred troops as the Red Burial, the guardians of the Republic, and they reached the gates of the Republic's Winter Palace on Valentine's Day. Octavia led the assault from the riverside as the false Red Burial poured through the landside gates, stirring up the shadows of the building, invoking its architectural memory of mobs and riots.

The *real* Red Burial, their lust for ousting a Romanov rekindled by memories of storming the Palace once before, soon defected to Octavia's side. The combined force smashed its way through the defending malcontents as Octavia and Anastasia faced each other in the Malachite Room, the power-centre of the Republic. Both women knew each other's techniques, skills and tricks: they were well matched in strength and experience. Then Anastasia's weakness, her utter trust in the prophecies, became her downfall as she became convinced that Octavia was *destined* to defeat her. The Romanov is said to have fallen to her knees on the solid

malachite table, the Republic falling with her. It's also said that Octavia sealed the surrender with a kiss.

Most members of the defeated army were offered a chance to rejoin the Eleven-Day Empire – by this stage in the War, any experienced fighters were welcome [see also Removal of Members] – but the surviving ringleaders were lined up and executed, an incredibly rare sanction among the ranks of Faction Paradox, which usually encourages its members to punish themselves.

***CHAD* VANDEMEER *(1952 – PRESENT)* [*Remote: Participant (Earth, C20-21)*]** The professional lives of Chad Vandemeer and Michael Brookhaven were linked almost from beginning to end, at least as far as Faction Hollywood was concerned. It was Vandemeer who recruited Brookhaven into the cabal in 1977. It was Vandemeer's connections within the entertainment industry which initially gained Brookhaven access to the studio system. While Brookhaven concentrated on large-scale big-screen projects, Vandemeer worked behind the scenes in network television, at that point a smaller medium but one with a greater level of penetration into the mass consciousness. It was during this period that cinema productions first began to advertise on the networks, the two media having been wary of each other in previous decades, and throughout the 1980s it became clear to both men that there was a very specific kind of power in the relationship between the two. By the time of Brookhaven's removal in 1999 the symbiosis was complete, with seed-programmes transmitted in the '70s and '80s blossoming into full-scale movie projects and triggering memetic markers of adolescent desire, childhood vulnerability and now-unfocused Cold War anxiety planted in the audiences decades previously. (This is the same technique used by the Great Houses to implant "briefings" in their human recruits, not only seeding subjects with information but directly manipulating their emotional connection to that information. The Californian use of the technology is less brutal, if not a great deal more subtle.)

All things considered it's fitting that Vandemeer was also the kev to Brookhaven's fall. While working at UPN, Vandemeer was assigned to produce the series *Through the Eye of Eternity* and had the task of searching the prop department for "futuristic" material. After rooting through storage facilities full of lava lamps and plastic consoles left over from previous SF efforts, Vandemeer and his team must have been surprised to find a fully-functional Celestis meme-mine (later renamed the GCI processor). It's unknown how such an item found its way to UPN central properties store-room #17, although it's certainly possible the Celestis themselves planted it there as a form of cultural booby-trap.

After a certain amount of experimentation, which resulted in the *Through The Eye Of Eternity* episodes "Oops Titanic", "There's No Ball Like Cher-No-

Ball" and "Miss Hiroshima", Vandemeer concluded that the device was somehow locked into moments of absolute disaster. Nonetheless, he smuggled the processor from the studio and delivered it into Brookhaven's hands. It's tempting to believe, given Vandemeer's own decision not to use the mine, that this was intended as a form of assassination. Within a year the GCI processor had been removed by the House Military; Brookhaven was missing presumed erased; and Vandemeer was, after many years, the key player in Faction Hollywood.

He remains the unofficial centre of the group's operations, although since Brookhaven's fall the cabal has entered another one of its quiet phases. There's a very real chance that this time it may not recover. While Faction Hollywood has always increased the value of its stock in Los Angeles by exploiting the more *ungainly* aspects of the entertainment industry, the Brookhaven era introduced so many easy-to-use ritual techniques to the studio system that even the most banal of production companies is now beginning to make the Faction's operations look old-fashioned and amateurish.

Thanks to the digital revolution, the *loa* engineered by Cousin Gable can be mass-accessed and mass-marketed via rites easily performed in any boardroom, restaurant or secretarial office. These days Hollywood virtually runs on automatic.

***THE* VENUE ACCORDS [*All Sides: Treaty/Location (Early War Era)*]**
The Venue Accords are now almost forgotten, and are an embarrassment to all sides in the War who nurtured them. Anyone who hopes to revive them, probably in the mistaken belief that they represent a potential peace plan, is doomed to disappointment and an entirely unrewarding military career. The Accords were hammered out in peace negotiations which lasted less than one picosecond and are in essence an agreement to disagree. Most interpretations of the Accords concur with the conclusion that peace is an impossibility, that alliances may shift, grow or wither, but that the basic enmities between the rival powers are ineluctable.

Inconclusive though they were, the Venue negotiations did represent a major diplomatic coup in so far as all the major parties involved in the War were assembled in the same place at the same time, with the notable exception of Faction Paradox. This isn't entirely surprising. Within months of the Accords being created the Second Wave had begun its crippling crusade against the Faction's powerbases across the Spiral Politic, and the Venue's architects had perhaps decided that the organisation's input would be irrelevant. In any case, the Faction's absence was hardly noted at the time, leading to later speculation that the Accords were a hoax in very poor taste and that the Faction was responsible.

The architects of the Venue remain a mystery, acting only through a human agent whose own identity is almost as opaque as his masters', although the level of engineering involved (and the curious choice of a *human* host) has led many to conclude that it may have been designed by the same hand which created the City of the Saved. The logistics of bringing together the various parties under the auspices of a single human agent must have been immense, but the physical nature of the Venue helped. Most accounts agree that the Venue was a construct the size of a small galaxy. It existed, as far as anyone can tell, for the minimum quantifiable discrete unit of time and yet theoretically intersected every single space-time point in the Spiral Politic. And the Venue was sentient. The Master Accords – though not the copies – weren't signed on any recognised medium, but formed part of the transmutive architecture of the Venue itself. It's doubtful that the representatives ever met face to face though the foreword to the Accords, written with a melodramatic flourish,

states that they did. In fact all that was necessary for the Accords to take place was for the representatives to board the Venue. The computative sections of the architecture could process their agendas and secret desires, and attempt to correlate from that information an agreement on which everyone could agree.

The Venue succeeded but only in finding a mutual agreement to wage war. The possibility of a satisfactory peace was, for the moment at least, out of the question.

The breakdown of the negotiations followed soon after the preliminary Master Accords were outlined. The Great Houses had become particularly aggrieved, realising that the Venue was a modelled space-time event similar to their own timeships. According to Homeworld records, they feared a security breach and immediately abandoned the Venue. The various delegates of the Remote soon followed, leaving behind a ship-killer anarchitect almost as an afterthought, one of the more exotic items from the Remote weaponstores. (Evidently the Venue and the timeships weren't as similar as the Houses feared: the anarchitect remained dormant.)

Other parties had their own suspicions and reasons for fleeing the Venue. It was suggested by one group that the Venue's architects had assembled the site purely in order to take sexual advantage of female members of all the attendant parties. The Venue was a hoax: all the other representatives were actors impersonating their enemies. The Venue itself was malevolent and was seeking a decisive preemptive advantage before entering the War on *its own* side. Meanwhile the departing Remote delegates took the non-attendance of Faction Paradox as a sign that their Faction mentors were a spent and irrelevant power, the first sign of the coming schism between the two.

Whatever the causes, negotiations didn't continue. The Venue itself ceased to exist, the forces binding it together withdrawing, prompting some regrets as if this might have been a genuine attempt to find peace after all.

***FORMER CITIZEN* VERRIFANT [*House Military: Participant (City of the Saved/Present)*]** One-time Lord Mayor (AF 260 – 262, by the City calendar) of the City of the Saved. Originally a native of a human colony world, Verrifant (orig. 3560 – 3591 AD) was, as far as researchers can ascertain, one of those present on the colony when the Great Houses appropriated it as one of their duplicate Nine Homeworlds. Verrifant and his family were biologically altered in the process, mutated into weapons to serve the Great Houses and used as cannon fodder against the forces of neighbouring human colony worlds when they attempted to repel the system's invaders. Verrifant was killed, but the enduring effect of his contact with the Houses seems to have been akin to Stockholm Syndrome, whereby the victim of a kidnapping becomes devoted to the kidnapper. On his resurrection in the City of the Saved, Verrifant apparently longed to re-establish contact between himself and the Homeworld.

None of this was known during Verrifant's political career: resurrection had returned him to his human-normal body, and he consistently lied about his age, claiming to have lived on the colony a hundred years before the arrival of the Houses. Appearing as a moderate within the Chamber of Residents, Verrifant was selected for the City Council and elected as Mayor, the belief being that his were a safe pair of hands. In reality Verrifant planned to end the City's neutrality, and campaigned urgently during his Mayoralty for an alliance with the Houses. When it became apparent that he wouldn't convince the Council, he signed a secret treaty with House Mirraflex and in AF 262 betrayed the City, personally opening the Uptime Gate to Lady Armourer Mantissa's fleet of timeships.

When House Mirraflex's invasion proved abortive Verrifant fled, officially defecting to the Homeworld, where he was recruited once more as an augmented regen-inf soldier. The City now celebrates an annual Verrifant's Night, when effigies of the unfortunate Mayor are incinerated, exploded or otherwise defiled according to cultural tradition. Given that Verrifant himself is once again serving with the military of the Great Houses, he will inevitably die again at some point: the City Council has devoted considerable effort to tracking down his putative second version within the City and bringing him to trial.

***THE* VIEWERS AND LISTENERS PROTOCOLS [*Remote: Text*]** A collection of papers, recordings and fragments of ceremonial regalia, all of them originating in the Parliament of the Eleven-Day Empire and all products of a "debate" in the higher ranks of Faction Paradox (the Parliament never "argues", as such) with one underlying theme: *what do we do with the Remote*? The minutes were taken shortly after Faction Paradox had first set their Remote armies loose on the universe, and the emergency sessions of the Parliament were held in the wake of the ludicrous Remote assault on Simia-KK98, when the Remote – all of them trying to copy the generic, gung-ho War transmissions pumped into their media by the Faction itself – insisted on running straight into the enemy's defensive positions one after another in the heroic assumption that a one-in-a-million chance of survival was a pretty good set of odds.

To the Faction's credit, the Eleven-Day Empire quickly realised the problem. In principle the cultural engineering programme was a sound one. It was the content of the Remote's media that was the trouble. The concept of the War was always present in the signals, as was the underlying suggestion that it was always best to take the Faction's advice as to what places might be attacked next, but these themes were so repetitive that many of the transmissions were positively *banal*. And, again to the Faction's credit, the elders willingly accepted this: after all, they were products of the Homeworld at heart, and anybody engine-bred on the Homeworld was bound to have a disadvantage when it came to creativity. As the Godmother of the House recorded at the time: 'For these people, having a viable culture […] might be the only difference between being superhuman and being *sub*human.'

It was ultimately decided that if anything was to be salvaged from the Remote project then the Remote had to be given more room. There'd be no more assaults, after Simia-KK98. Instead the Remote would be temporarily cut off from Faction influence, left to their own devices in their (reasonably) safe colony-cities. The Mothers and Father in charge of the project would watch and listen, but not intervene, the hope being that free of too much interference their cultures might expand and make them the unguessable creatures they'd been raised to be. And perhaps it would have

worked, if the Great Houses' own crusades hadn't disrupted so many operations within the provinces of the Eleven-Day Empire.

In a sense the Viewers and Listeners Protocols saw the creation of the Faction's "Remote Mark Two", short-lived as the project might have been. Various other Remote colonies were founded after the KK98 fiasco, although they were all purely experimental. From a local-chronological point of view the earliest of these projects was on Earth itself in the nineteenth century, where Remote ideas were introduced to certain non-technological tribes in order to discover whether the same patterns would repeat themselves even in pre-television cultures with a liking for totems. (As the North American warrior tribes proved, they did… but even members of these pre-mass-media cultures could fall foul of confusing signals, as the North American warrior messiah Wovoka demonstrated.)

VLAD III *OF WALLACHIA (1431 – 1973 AD)* [*Lesser Species: Participant (Earth, CI5-20)*] Warrior-prince, apprentice of the Order of the Dragon and three-times ruler of an Eastern European province on the frontline of the war between the Christian and Islamic worlds, Vlad III is known not just for his political importance in fifteenth-century history (he briefly drove back the invading Sultan Mehmed II through a combination of terror and vicious military tactics) but also for the harsh – some would say pathological – regime of discipline he inflicted on his subjects. There's no accurate way of establishing how many of his own countrymen he butchered during his reign, but he was a man so convinced of his own right to rule, his own *correctness* as a Christian prince, that he had no qualms about torturing members of the peasantry to death on suspicion of laziness or, in one instance, burning hundreds of the poor and sick to death inside a single building in the name of "prosperity". His mass-killing of 23,000 Muslims at Tirgoviste in 1461 is particularly notorious.

The Tirgoviste incident was an important turning-point, both from Vlad's point of view and in terms of the War. It was because of this near-ritualistic act that the Celestis were first witnessed by humanity, the earliest (chronological) intrusion of a War Era culture on Earth. It was the beginning of a chain of events which would ensure Vlad's unexpected longevity, although as a result of the same process his activities beyond the late 1400s are foggy at best. It's fair to say that when Tirgoviste was touched on by the ulterior worlds of the Celestis, Vlad was both unusually prepared and arrogant enough to believe that his 'just law' could master this new threat. He would have had some knowledge of non-human lore by this point, but it's unlikely he'd ever encountered anything truly monstrous before 1461 (except, of course, the results of his own sadism).

There's no way of knowing what the first manifestations in the city might have been, although enough is known about the Celestis' methods to make an educated guess. Whenever the correct use of images allows one of the Lords of the Celestis to make its presence felt in the Spiral Politic, the Lord will almost always appear in the most blatant, spectacular and grotesque form possible, its very appearance demanding the supplication of any witnesses. The deal a Celestis offers to a potential servant is a Faustian one: they typically play up to this idea, often appearing as Mephistophelean

cardinals, with horned heads hung with rubies or bloated, goat-like faces. The subject can only receive the Mark of Indenture by his or her own will, but many of the Celestis's servants must agree to the bargain out of pure intimidation.

Vlad III wouldn't have been cowed. If any agents of the Celestis appeared before him at Tirgoviste then it's easy to believe he'd only have seen interlopers, intruders on his territory, an offence against the law of the *voivode*. And as mere ideas abroad, what could the Celestis do to persuade him otherwise?

It would be tempting to sav that Vlad III became erratic after his first glimpse of the non-human worlds, but "erratic" is a loaded word when dealing with a man who once drove nails through the heads of visiting diplomats for the crime of wearing their hats in his presence. In those few weeks after Tirgoviste became a prayer-wheel of the dead and dying, the military orders under Vlad's control were frequently led to areas along the banks of the Danube which were thought to be devoid of any Turkish activity. On one occasion his scouts came across a line of monks who'd been tortured to death on sharpened poles, Vlad's own handiwork from some weeks previously, but rather than admire his achievements Vlad instantly ordered the bodies burned (and according to some versions of the story, the scouts along with them) as they 'offended his eye'. It was almost as if he'd begun to understand what these stylised executions had brought to the world, and wished to erase the markings he'd made which had brought Mictlan one step closer.

Yet the forest of the dead outside Tirgoviste itself was left standing. Vlad couldn't bring himself to remove it, not while there was still a threat from the Turkish army. In fact the province would soon fall to the Turks anyway, under the command of Vlad's own brother, the Sultan's new puppet-prince. Though Vlad would return in 1476, it was the incident at Tirgoviste for which he'd be best-remembered. After the fall of Wallachia there are only myths: the battle at Gragov; the "Deal with the Devil" in Vlad's castle at Poenari (thought by many to have been an agreement with the Celestis Lord Halved Birth); his apparent death in 1476, and the subsequent display of a curious severed head at Constantinople, In a sense, beyond the fifteenth century Vlad III ceases to be the *real* Vlad III at all, and becomes a

ghost almost as insubstantial as the Celestis themselves… a result, most probably, of the Poenari agreement.

Even his eventual demise, allegedly at the hands of a Celestis Investigator, is a puzzle. With his bloodline lost and all power over Wallachia lost with it, such a man could only fade into insignificance. Or perhaps that was always bound to be part of the deal.

VOODOO CHARTER [*Lesser Species: Treaty*] A mostly-unwritten agreement outlining the ethical boundaries of the Remonstration Bureau, a society which to date remains the only time-active assassination society to be recognised by the Great Houses, largely due to the efforts of its founder Mrs. Foyle. Prior to the War, Mrs. Foyle made a habit of turning down any contract which might have involved or drawn the attention of the major powers: the War changed this insofar as the Great Houses were suddenly alert to abuses of their own time-technology. A time-active brothel like the House of the Rising Sun might have seemed a minor infringement of the Protocols, but the Remonstration Bureau had a much greater potential for causal havoc. When the assassin-automaton the Knight Immortal was expelled from the Bureau and recruited by the enemy, it was a political disaster for Mrs. Foyle. The Knight itself was lost, believed destroyed, during the Lethean Campaign (to the relief of all concerned), but the Homeworld suddenly had cause to turn its attention to the Bureau itself. Fortunately this wasn't a surprise to Mrs Foyle, who'd already taken steps to protect her operations.

It's well-known that the Remonstration Bureau is based on a solar orbital satellite but its precise location remains a guarded secret. Though partially open to the public, it can be accessed only through authorised time-travel and matter displacement rather than a direct approach, and for good reason. As the Homeworld discovered when they finally traced its location, Mrs Foyle had chosen one of the least accessible points in the Spiral Politic from which to run her operations. The Bureau's satellite exists only at the very end of the lifespan of the universe. The host star is seconds away from destruction, as the last energy of the cosmos suffers a total entropic collapse. The satellite itself is built in a permanent time-loop which keeps snatching it out of both decaying orbit and the extinction of baryonic matter. It has no conventional defences, but the loop and the inaccessible location have effectively made an attack on the Remonstration Bureau slightly too much bother for any of the time-active powers unless thev should feel directly threatened. Far from being a formal treaty, then, the Charter is an acknowledgement that war on the Bureau is just rather *unlikely*.

But while most of the major powers were content to ignore small-scale abuses of time-travel technology, Faction Paradox was forced to confront Mrs Foyle when she established an outpost of her House of the Rising Sun within the Eleven Day Empire itself. Most outrageously, she was able to operate for an entire week before anyone in the higher ranks of the Faction noticed. The incident seems to have been resolved without any unpleasantness, and it was here that one of the few written sections of the Charter was drafted, a clause which would also give the Charter its name.

The Faction's archive indicates why the Mothers and Fathers felt it necessary – appropriate, even – to come to an accommodation with Mrs Foyle. At the same time it gives some indication of how she was able to penetrate the Eleven Day Empire without alerting the *loa* which traditionally guard the city. According to the records, Mrs Foyle seems to have been a form of practising *voodoo priestess*. She supposedly claimed: 'I was raised as a good Catholic so vodou – or *voodoo* if you will – is second nature to me.' This was enough to fool the Faction's *loa* into accepting her as one of their own, although in her own words 'you can't trick the *loa*, you have to *court* them'.

Her agreement with the Faction, a clause in the Voodoo Charter preventing the Bureau's assassins taking on targets within the Eleven-Day Empire, might even be construed as a non-aggression pact between two time-active "hit and run" powers. In a War marked by diplomatic failures like the Venue Accords, it remains one of the few binding agreements between those smaller, independent War-time groups which the Great Houses would classify as guerrillas or, at best, as rank amateurs.

***THE* WALKING DEAD [*Lesser Species*: *Participants*]** Every world has legends of people not-quite-there, of corpses walking with arms outstretched to drag the living into graves, or swamps, or secret underground empires. For the Great Houses the term has a special resonance. Time-travellers see the walking dead around them all the time.

James Thomson, the nineteenth-century poet and himself one of the dead, wrote in 1874:

'They have much wisdom, yet they are not wise,
They have much goodness, yet they do not well,
(The fools we know have their own paradise,
The wicked also their own proper Hell);
They have much strength, but still their doom is stronger,
Much patience, but their tune endureth longer,
Much valour but life mocks it with some spell […]
'And some are great in rank and wealth and power,
And some renowned for genius and for worth;
And some are poor and mean, who brood and cower
And shrink from notice, and accept all dearth
Of body, heart and soul, and leave to others
All boons of life; yet these and those are brothers,
The saddest and the weariest men on earth.'

These are the dead. These are the ghosts of causality. The Great Houses might observe them in a certain time and place in the Spiral Politic, but when the timeships sweep past that way again they're gone. Science suggests that they have *minimal temporal inertia*, or that they've been pared down by random circumstances until they live only in one or two of the billion strands of time which make up the structure of history. The War ravels and unravels the strands, and as it does so the dead are swept away.

Certain people of giant stature, of great renown, of high history occupy positions which barely change across the great swathe of the probability threads (but so too do certain beggars, children and schizophrenics). To them a War-time victory for either side barely alters the design of their medals, or the size of their begging-patch, or the colour of their dolls' hair. To the walking dead, the opposite is true. Most are unheard-of, but here

and there for a day, or a week, or a year, a person with no evident importance will rise and briefly bathe in glory. Yet they can be disabled by an accidental sneeze of air, or be wiped out by the random molecules evaporating from a beached timeship a hundred thousand years earlier. It's believed that they somehow sense this, that they feel their weakness like a cold hand around their hearts, sense it, fear it and are feared in return.

The House Military's use of ghost cluster devices to artificially reduce a person to this condition is one of the most distasteful developments in the field of retro-weaponry, and has now been officially abandoned by both House Arpexia and House Xianthellipse. James Thomson himself may have been a victim of such a device, linked by an accident of birth to the Star Chamber (as it happens he was even born in the year of the Chamber's downfall, 1834) and caught up in the Houses' cleaning-up exercise against the Chamber's members. Reduced to a hollowed-out shell of his complete self, his descendants are still only *occasionally* found to have existed.

An account of the walking dead seizing a timeship during the Lethean Campaign must be discounted as pure invention, at least for the time being. Specialists in aurally transmitted culture suggest that the next logical stage in the rumour would be a piratical timeship crewed by these "zombies" of history. Faction Paradox's response to this idea can be best conveyed by the phrase: 'I wish we'd thought of that.'

WALLACHIA [*Lesser Species: Location (Earth, C15)*] Former Eastern European province located between Hungary and Constantinople, and in the fifteenth century the battlefield where the armies of Christianity attempted to hold off the overwhelming Turkish forces moving in from the east. The most famous ruler of the province was Vlad III the 'Son of the Dragon', who for some time held off the Turks with a combination of terror-tactics and ruthless zeal (at one stage he razed the villages of his own people to the ground, poisoned the wells and murdered large numbers of the inhabitants, to ensure that the advancing Turks wouldn't gain any food, water or aid). It was Vlad III, also, who was responsible for the ceremonial killing at the capital city of Tirgoviste which inadvertently brought the Celestis to humanity for the first time. When Tirgoviste was finally taken in 1462, it was Vlad's own brother Radu, 'Radu the Handsome', who led the Turkish army through the forest of pierced and butchered corpses which Vlad had erected outside his capital. Both Vlad and Radu had been held hostage by the Sultan at Adrianople in their youth, but while the experience had only sharpened Vlad's sadistic tendencies, young Radu had been drawn into the Islamic practices of the Turks and was now seen by the Sultan as a potential puppet-ruler.

However self-possessed he might have been, during his last days of Tirgoviste – as the stench of the corpses filled the air and the signs of the Celestis began to manifest themselves in the streets – Vlad was still aware of the military situation. He knew he'd never be able to withstand the Turkish army which was now quite specifically coming for his blood. It was at this stage that he finally decided to abandon the city, and with his own military cabal headed for Poenari, over seventy kilometres away. It was a reasonable move. Poenari was the site of his mountain retreat, and in addition to its strategic value it was also the resting-place of the pre-human relics inherited from the Order of the Dragon.

The accounts of this last desperate march to Poenari are contradictory. The descriptions given by the (surviving) troops speak of days and nights spent marching across bare and stony ground, at some points with 'nothing to see on any point [of the compass, i.e. on the horizon]'. An odd assertion, considering that the nearby mountains would have been well within sight for much of the journey. Weather was bad, with the stormclouds blotting

out most of the sunlight even though it never seemed to want to rain. It was said that many detected a very definite smell in the air, the same smell which had accompanied Vlad's mass-executions at Tirgoviste and Brasov. Perhaps because of the erratic changes in the sky there was a belief among the men that the trek had taken far longer than seems feasible. Vlad himself rode close to the head of the assembly, rarely taking his eyes off the horizon ahead or even acknowledging the bodyguard cortege around him (much to their relief, perhaps).

Shortly before the party reached Poenari, as Vlad's men finally approached the lower reaches of the mountains, they saw the outpost.

Modern historians tend to dismiss the settlement reported by Vlad's retinue as a hallucination, or at least a partial hallucination, brought on by the atrocious conditions of the march from Tirgoviste. It's known that a settlement *did* once stand on the site of the mythical battle at Gragov, but it was a village with no military application at all, certainly not the 'yellow fortress' described by a few of those who survived to complete the march. Though the accounts agree that it was small, they also agree that it was definitely a fortress. The stonework was the colour of stained ivory; the walls were sloped; the stones were carved with inscriptions in an 'ungodly language' (meaning an Islamic language, although this is unlikely and probably just reflects the soldiers' own prejudice). Vlad's bodyguard had been trained to expect any manner of sorcery from the east, and they certainly would have heard the stories of the djinn which had arrived in Eastern Europe via Constantinople. After all, hadn't King Solomon battled an entire army of these djinn at a legendary City of Brass, full of buildings just like this peculiar new castle?

In truth, of course, the Gragov outpost had nothing to do with the djinn. But what did the *voivode* Vlad make of it, when he first saw its squat little shape set against the mountain range? There's some evidence to suggest he was literally following a s*cent* on the journey towards Poenari, not taking the most direct route despite the pursuit of Radu's army, and there's a certain logic in this. The delusions which so many people had suffered in the capital (delusions or manifestations, the two are virtually identical in the case of the Celestis) had largely been triggered by smell, the wind blowing traces of 23,000 butchered Turks through the streets. Now Vlad

and his army were not only downwind of the capital, they were at the point where all the winds met, where the stench from Tirgoviste combined with the dying breaths of all those Vlad had left to suffer in the lands surrounding his castle. As far as the *voivode* was concerned, this was where the Celestis, these devils which had tormented him even in his own home and capital, held their court.

Hence Wallachia became the site of the very first War-time outpost on Earth, although full diplomatic contact between humanity and the War Era factions wouldn't take place for another three (local) centuries. In any case, the outpost was a purely temporary one. The subsequent battle at Gragov, Vlad's desperate attempt to breach the fortress, was a dismal failure: and once the Sultan's puppet-prince was installed at Tirgoviste, the forest of corpses there was removed and the fortress in the mountain foothills was never seen again. The site of Gragov has remained unoccupied ever since.

***THE* WAR KING [*Great Houses: Participant (Present)*]** The War King of the Great Houses, the Homeworld's current ruler and acting head of the Presidency, is the first to go by that title (although if it's true that each of the Nine Homeworlds has its own Presidency, then some would argue that there may be nine different War Kings and Queens). A renegade and exile from the Houses in the Pre-War era, he was part of the first generation of Homeworld to *produce* renegades: indeed, he may have been spawned by the same flaws in the Houses' breeding-engines which produced even more legendary transgressions like the Imperator Presidency and the Grandfather of House Paradox. But while the Imperator led a crusade in the name of military conquest, and the Grandfather seemed to have a rather more philosophical agenda for subverting the ruling Houses' authority, the young War King was a bored, amoral outlaw, dedicated to his own desires above all else, meddling in the affairs of the lesser species for no other reasons than power, personal gratification and perhaps even casual amusement.

The future War King originally left the Homeworld at an early age, for reasons which remain unclear, and was considered the second-most wanted criminal among the Great Houses in an era when the notion of "criminals'' had only just occurred to them. The Houses actually managed to capture him on a number of occasions, but never managed to imprison him for any length of time before his eventual escape, another trait he shared with the Grandfather. He was notorious for hiring, manipulating and seducing a variety of lesser species, many of them mercenary or megalomaniac in nature, and it's possible that it was through his association with them that he became aware of the imminent War… the first step in his gradual (and quite legal) rise to power.

Some eighty years before the outbreak of the War, the future War King returned to the Homeworld against all expectations. He's known to have cornered the head of the Presidency during this visit. The official memoir states that he infiltrated the presidential chambers, killed at least three members of the ceremonial guard and had the nominal ruler of the Homeworld completely at his mercy for up to fifteen minutes. The Presidency of the day was famous for its stoicism, its head not even batting an eyelid throughout the many petty incursions and invasions attempted

by the lesser species during this troubled era. But all of those close to the Presidency agreed that being held hostage by the War King was a foundation-shattering experience for its leader. When asked what happened, the head's only recorded response was: 'He talked about a War, and… no, it's quite unthinkable.' At this point there was talk of some possible imminent catastrophe among the Houses, yet from hereon in the Presidency refused to let the matter even be raised in public.

Five years later, the War King returned again. He turned himself in to the authority of the ruling Houses, being wanted for crimes which taxed the limits of two whole datacoils. He denied none of his offences, but simply asked to address a Closed Session of the ruling Houses before his sentence of retro-annulment was carried out. The Presidency argued strongly against this, though the presidential elite were clearly outnumbered. In protest, the head of the Presidency refused to participate in this Audience and was thus absent when the War King first addressed the Houses. Nor was he able to suppress the pardon which the ruling Houses suddenly seemed so happy to grant.

From this moment until the administration eventually fell, the Presidency became known as the most obstructionist of any in the Pre-War era. Any suggestion of forward momentum was quashed quickly and without thought, particularly any hint of recognition of – much less negotiation with – the supposed future enemy (an enemy which, it seemed, had profoundly changed the War King's attitude to his own Homeworld). It was as if the Presidency refused to do anything about this potential new menace for fear that taking action would only prove the War King right.

▲ *THE WAR KING.*

Which naturally prompted some consternation from the War King when he once again returned to the Homeworld after another four decades. His intention had been to present the Houses with the new armament

protocols he'd been developing since his last appearance. No doubt he'd have been furious, had he been given the opportunity.

The moment the War King's (self-engineered) timeship entered the domains of the Great Houses, agents loyal to the Presidency made their move, capturing the War King literally before he even set foot on the Homeworld. The Presidency itself immediately convened an emergency meeting of the ruling Houses, and it was in this meeting that the Faraway Declaration was given, a declaration which actually led to the utter downfall of the Presidency and the inauguration of Academician Umbaste just six days later. Horrified as the Houses were by the Faraway debacle, some of them must have breathed a sigh of relief. By now it was clear to most of the Houses that some form of conflict was, indeed, inevitable. Once the War King had been released, preparations could finally be made. The former renegade involved himself heavily in the renovation of the House militia under Umbaste's "administration", thus endearing him to the new troops as they were created, and while an undercurrent of enmity towards the more *political* Great Houses currently exists in the military any criticism of the War King is usually met with brutal hostility.

At the end of Umbaste's thirty-year reign, the ruling Houses could no longer afford to ignore its lack of a true presidential head. The obvious candidate, it was nigh-unanimously felt, was the War King. The lone dissenting vote was the King himself. The head of House Dvora wrote: 'We had, of course, suggested installing him as our official War-leader many times before, but he'd always demurred. He'd claim that his chequered past was too much of an impediment to him openly taking the reins of power. The rest of us offered to expunge his record, to wipe his slate clean, as it were. We actually carried out the first part of the expunging without his say-so, which is why only fragmentary records of his past now exist.'

Ultimately he accepted the position as the anchor of the Presidency, but as the War King's inaugural speech made clear, while he accepted the presidential responsibilities he refused any presidential title [see below].

Since then, the War King has become much more of a recluse. True to his vow, since he took office he has yet to address the assembled Houses, The heads of the ruling Houses are always complimentary, pointing out how

integral he is to the War effort, speaking of his passion for the safety of his people and his ingenuity regarding military strategy. He occasionally makes appearances before the military forces, seeming to prefer them to civilian interaction. It's known that he was the only member of the Great Houses to successfully broker a deal with the "renegade" sentient timeship Compassion, their last meeting having been recorded by Compassion's human travelling companion Carmen Yeh.

His personal assistant notes that his office is brimming with official business, but devoid of decoration. The only concession he makes to sentimentality are the components of a hypercube, twelve white squares stacked neatly on his desk. Its significance is unclear, but it's thought to be the War King's last remaining link with his unfortunate past.

The War King's Inaugural Address

'It has been traditional for someone in my position to make a speech. The heads of the ruling houses, able as they are, were very insistent on this point. They were right. During times such as these, we must remember those traditions which have done us credit and adhere to them ever more closely. So here I stand.

'The heads of the ruling Houses were also insistent that I should speak of the invulnerability of our civilisation. To remind my audience that we are Engineers of History, Lords of the Continua, Overseers to Causality itself, *ad nauseum*. They were hopeful that I might begin this speech – as so many of my predecessors did – with the declaration, "my people, the Homeworld is eternal, and it is strong". In this, I'm afraid they're to be disappointed.

'The Homeworld is not strong. Nor is it eternal.

'Many of you know me. You know of my past. It's a past of rebellion and recklessness, of childish dreams, adolescent rages and ageless arrogance. I once embraced the bombastic titles I just mentioned, considering myself the ruler of everything that any intelligent creature can comprehend. And as my past is known to our world, I, in turn, know the past of our world, perhaps better than the noblest and most learned of our historians. Indeed, the very fact that we now have historians, that we now have *history*,

suggests that our world is not, and never has been, eternal. Change is merely a concept with which we've grown unfamiliar.

'We have inherited dangerous times. It was the policy of one of my predecessors to ignore the enemy, and we may still suffer because of it. Yes: I use the word "enemy", and it's a word with which we must re-acquaint ourselves. We can no longer believe that there are only *inconveniences* in the outside universe, or that opposition to our regime is impossible. If we can't even refer to our enemy as an enemy, then how can we ever hope to defend ourselves against it? We run from confronting it even on the field of semantics. I don't know how this absurd superstition started, but the cowardice ends here, and now.

'The Homeworld is not strong, but once it was, and it will be again. Make no mistake. We are to be at War. If any of you have any doubts regarding that fact, I'm sure the predecessor I mentioned could use some company, if you can brave the journey to that particular locale.

'We are to be at War. But we will prevail. All cowardice, all doubts, all weaknesses end here, I hereby eschew all titles, all claims to the regalia of the Presidency. When next I address you in this setting, with representatives of all of the Houses present, it will be to announce our victory. And it will be then – and only then – that we may truly address each other by the titles we've used in the past.'

WAR PREDICTIONS [*Great Houses: texts (Pre-War Era)*] By the time of the last Pre-War millennium, the Great Houses had existed for approximately ten-million years in a state of virtual stasis. There were no real enemies, and hadn't been ever since the first, primal, pre-historic war against the Yssgaroth (which is to say, history was only firmly established once the war was concluded). There were frequently minor disturbances in the historical meta-structure, occasional risk points in the Spiral Politic as lesser species would develop limited forms of time-technology, but these were only minor distractions. Among the Houses, there was the kind of status quo which can only ever be found in a culture set to one side of normal-time.

And yet around nine-hundred years before the outbreak of the War, something began to change. There were irregularities in the Houses' breeding-engines. After the Imperator Presidency there was a growing sense of anxiety that the walls around the Homeworld might collapse, that the lesser species might find some way of breaching the Houses' integrity *even though recorded history showed no such moves being made by those species*. As the centuries sped past, groups like Faction Paradox and the Celestis demonstrated that it was possible for sections of House society to tear themselves away from tradition and collide with the outside universe. Suddenly bio-diversity reared its ugly head; suddenly the ruling Houses were developing individual identities rather than speaking in the same mumbling, self-satisfied tones; suddenly there was something hormonal in the air, as if it had become clear that the War was on the way and the shock had made the children of the Houses remember their sweaty, animal origins.

It's unclear, even now, what the exact relationship was between the War and this age of paranoia. It's possible that the Houses were sensing the future bearing down on them and beginning to panic, but it's also possible that the War was in some way a *result* of the increasing paranoia (this makes a certain sense, given the nature of the enemy). What's clear is that in the Pre-War centuries there were numerous predictions, auguries and feasibility scenarios, all of them anticipating some form of conflict but none of them supplying enough detail to allow the Houses to prepare even for the first battle on Dronid.

Two of these War prophesies tend to stand out, given later events.

War Predictions: Chatelaine Thessalia

The Chatelaine Thessalia, first (and only effective) head of the Order of the Weal, was prescient of the War. She was a disciple of the Imperator himself, so this shouldn't be surprising, and the conflict is a possibility which plays on her mind and recurs throughout her writings in *The Little Book of Absolute Power*. Many of her suggestions and preparations, had they been adopted, would have made a significant difference to the early years of the War. However, she made two assumptions that were not borne out. Firstly, that the enemy would be motivated unambiguously by a racial-survival agenda and would mainly be concerned with maintaining the integrity of its own bloodlines/timelines. Secondly, that only the final stages of the War would be fought physically, with no major assaults on the Homeworld until after the Houses had been thoroughly crippled. The first strike, she suggested, would be aimed at the Homeworld's noosphere, probably in the form of a language virus. (It was during the Chatelaine's lifetime that the experimental babels were developed as a line of defence for the noosphere, and the Order may have influenced their creation. Faction Paradox sources indicate that a diseased babel was held at the Order's chapterhouse for a short time while an effective means of execution was being devised, and more modern lore holds that the same chapterhouse was used to breed the later generation of babels even after the Order's fall.)

The minor Pre-War skirmishes between the Homeworld and the outside universe shattered Chatelaine's assumptions about the coming War. Some historians have speculated that the Chatelaine took advantage of the chaos in this period to clear up loose ends, shut down black projects and perhaps embark on a new recruitment drive. Subsequently the Order turned its attention to the possibility of a sustained invasion from a more formidable enemy than any of the lesser species, and in a desperate attempt to try to divine the future Thessalia herself became obsessed with *Violent Unknown Events*, an obsession which eventually led to her undoing after she finally ran headlong into the future on Zo la Domini.

War Predictions: The Rivera Manuscript

Document which originated (or at least passed through several native hands) on Earth, yet which seems to describe a long and convoluted experience with the drug praxis, a time-active substance usually associated with posthumanity rather than the twentieth century. Also called the *Praxis Manuscript*, the text was first recorded in the possession of the artist Diego Rivera and contains what seem to be semi-accurate predictions of War Era events.

The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges is known to have seen the manuscript, despite his usual reservations about reading anything longer than twelve pages. He appears to have regarded it as a poor imitation of Potocki's *Saragossa* manuscript, another important praxis-inspired work, but admitted that it had colourful moments and a cunning central device. Following Rivera's loss of the manuscript in Mexico it's next referred to in the writings of Isabel Allende, who records that it became a personal possession of her uncle Salvador shortly before his election to the Presidency of Chile. It was believed lost or destroyed after the fascist coup of 1973. In the 1970s it was found behind a filing cabinet in the Library of Congress in the United States of America, identified as genuine by the handwritten note to Rivera on the cover. Towards the end of the century it was stolen from an American private collector and soon afterwards appeared in the archives of the Eleven Day Empire. (In fairness to the Faction, it should be said that they did enter into a compact to purchase the manuscript legitimately and only resorted to theft when the other party welched on the deal.)

The Rivera Manuscript is now one of the most paradoxical artefacts in the Faction's collection and has been the subject of considerable study. Any description must bear in mind the fact that it is *not the original text*. Certainly, it's the typed manuscript thought to have been given to Rivera by an anonymous lover, but this manuscript is in itself a partial transcription into English of an earlier document. This appears to have been written in an unknown symbolic language, which the translation occasionally uses to convey statistical rather than personal information. Three-quarters of the manuscript remains untranslated and untranslatable. The remainder of the text is a first person account of an incident in the life of a renegade from the Homeworld. The account focuses on his imprisonment by an

unknown power and the results of his exposure to a high dosage of praxis at the hands of his captors.

Under the influence of praxis, claim the manuscript's apologists, the prisoner appeared to predict the start of the War. If he did, comes the reply, then he got an awful lot of it wrong.

Despite describing what must at least be considered an *alternative* start to the War [see Appendix IV for a full description], there still remains the possibility that the whole visionary experience was just a praxis-induced hallucination. The last word on the matter should be left to the author of the hand-written comments at the end of the manuscript. These are not in the handwriting of Rivera, or of the female companion who originally gave him the manuscript, and appear to predate the note on the front. The writing is also in English but close analysis suggests that it was not written by a human hand. It says, simply: *'Praxis is not a drug. Praxis is not a weapon. Praxis is not a training manual. Praxis is what we were meant to become.'*

WAVES *OF THE HOUSE MILITARY* [*House Military: Groups (War Era)*]
Whereas most military powers divide their forces into discrete units – army, navy, espionage agents, etcetera – the Great Houses distinguish between *their* War Era troops by generation. This makes sense, for a culture which constantly adapts its soldiery's bio-stock. The generation of a soldier not only defines that soldier's abilities, but even his or her shape (or *absence* of definite shape, in the case of those troops bred after the introduction of forced regen missions).

The word applied to each generation-unit of troops is *Wave*. Each Wave may be made up of any number of cohorts, strategists and guerrilla groups, but generally speaking every member of a Wave – whether they number in their hundreds or their thousands – will be launched from the Homeworld and deployed across the Spiral Politic at once, as soon as that generation has undergone training and biological preparation. From the Homeworld's point of view the history of the War has been a history of sudden bursts of activity against the enemy, followed by long periods of entrenchment while the ruling Houses pool their bio-resources and manufacture the next Wave of soldiers. (Although the Houses' mineral and energy resources are to all intents and purposes infinite, suitable biodata for their troops is another matter. Good biodata must be *cultivated*. In fact it's so rare a commodity that research is under way into a possible method of recycling it, not to mention the attempts of Houses like House Xianthellipse to super-cultivate the biodata of lesser species.)

So far there have been eight established Waves, each with its own distinct "flavour" and its own famous victories and defeats. It's also worth noting that the Houses number their War campaigns according to the Wave involved in the campaign, *not* sequentially: for example, the Third Wave participated in the Third Retro-War, although there never was a First or a Second Retro-War. At least, none that anyone can remember.

The First Wave: Accidental Soldiers

The First Wave was unique in that its troops weren't specifically designed for warfare. With the House Military in its infancy and the reproductive engines still being primed to produce soldiers, the First Wave troops were mostly ordinary members of the Great Houses – some of them taken from

the servitor classes of the ceremonial guard – augmented by whatever weapons technologies happened to be available at the time.

Fortunately for the Houses the enemy's earliest forces were similarly ill-equipped, and it was only after a series of bloody and confused First Wave skirmishes that the battle-lines of the War were laid down. As a result the First Wave veterans see themselves as having gone through "hard times" like no other Wave, and even seem proud to have kept the traditional, and often scarred, hominid forms of the traditional Houses. Very few, if any, First Wave veterans remain from the initial battle of the War on Dronid [for a more detailed account of which, see appendix I].

The Second Wave: Total War

The largest, most significant and most brutal Wave of the War Era, the Second Wave's soldiers were bred for total warfare by ruling Houses who had no real idea what total warfare meant. As a result the Wave was nothing short of a genocidal crusade, its complete intolerance of the Houses' enemies (or indeed, just their rivals) leading it to destroy entire *cultures* in an attempt to ensure the Homeworld's security. Faction Paradox, sitting ducks in the early War Era, suffered at the hands of the Second Wave more than any other group. Even when the Faction attempted to re-build its influence using the Remote, the Second Wave eradicated so many Remote colonies that the Faction's lines of communication remained shattered for years afterwards.

These days the Second Wave is largely regarded as something of a blunder, not because of the carnage it wrought (though there was some significant damage to causality) but because the crusade wasted so much time and effort on forces other than those of the *real* enemy. Only House Mirraflex still admits to any approval of the Second Wave's methods.

The Third Wave: Foreign Bodies

It had always been known that the troops of the Second Wave weren't exactly normal. Even apart from the psychological problems, when they were created certain bio-codes were woven into their bodies so that after any injury their cells would attempt to re-form the injured area in such a way that the same kind of attack wouldn't injure the soldier again. The

new generations learned from their wounds. But although there was *some* suggestion of this in the Second Wave, the Third Wave – a generation willing to play a far more cautious game against the enemy – was the first to show signs that the House Military's agents might one day lose their hominid profiles altogether. Though each one was engine-born with the usual humanoid appearance, it's thought that enough minor injuries to a Third Wave troop could trigger a full-blown metabolic alteration and turn the subject into little more than a walking war-machine (if "walking" is indeed the word).

It's something which makes many of the Third Wave veterans feel distinctly uneasy, although as yet none have survived enough battles to sustain sufficient wounds. Many are still in active service, however, so time may tell.

The Fourth Wave: The Human Touch

By this time bio-diversity was becoming an acceptable subject for debate among House society, so it's hardly surprising that House Xianthellipse should have taken the initiative. Xianthellipse had long been a proponent of the mongrel theory, the notion that the genetic matter from the lesser species should be used if the troops were to become truly adapted to the outside universe. Around half of the Fourth Wave cohorts were bred with this in mind.

More than any other factor the success of a Wave is measured by how stable it turns out to be, and whatever the more conservative ruling Houses might have expected the new generation *didn't* rise up against the elder Houses, side with the lesser species, or degenerate into a race of carnivorous apes (a notion which had been seriously suggested by the racial purists of House Mirraflex). But it is true to say that the Fourth Wave wasn't the most disciplined, and though none of the mongrel cohorts ever mutinied they were notorious for pushing the Protocols to their limits, making them better suited to guerrilla warfare than to organised battle. The most famous example of these tearaway soldiers was, and is, Robert Scarratt.

The Fifth Wave: Everyday Soldiers

The Fifth Wave came into service a quarter of a century after the start of the War, by which point the Houses seem to have finally settled into the idea that they were likely to be fighting for some time. The mass-breedings had become almost routine, and as a result the new soldiers were far more controlled – some would say *acceptable* – than previous versions. The military cell-codes developed for the Second and Third Waves were stabilised and mass-copied. The mongrel biodata of the Fourth Wave was introduced to the mix, in moderation and with a careful scanning procedure to remove the more renegade impulses. For the first time, a Wave was mass-produced without any political bickering or alleged instability.

At last the Great Houses were getting into the swing of things, and two-and-a-half decades on most veterans of the Fifth Wave are still in service. The only real criticism of them tends to come from the soldiers of the Fourth Wave, who claim that the newer-generation troops may be very efficient but that they're also very boring.

The Sixth Wave: Missing in Action

There never was a Sixth Wave. There was a Fifth, and a Seventh, but there's no record of any generation between the two. A recently-established Homeworld "tradition" claims that this is because of the 'symbolism of the number six' (an odd kind of superstition, given that there are six major ruling Houses), but this seems unlikely when one considers that there was a *very* large gap between the Fifth and the Seventh Waves. Of course, it could easily be inferred that the Sixth Wave *was* created but later retro-annulled and expunged from the timeline… suggesting either a very successful enemy attack, or a generation so biologically corrupt that the ruling Houses erased them just to save face.

At this point it might be worth repeating the oft-stated observation that if the enemy could find a way of retro-compromising the Houses' soldiers, then its influence could stretch back along those soldiers' timelines and affect the very natures of the breeding-engines. In which case, a Wave could theoretically be produced which would annul itself from birth or even be born supporting the wrong side.

The Seventh Wave: Special Operations

With many of the Fifth Wave cohorts still in service, the Seventh Wave was designed not to reinforce the regular troops but to create a hard-core assault force for specific, if savage, tactical missions. Reared to be as brutal as the Second Wave, but raised largely under the auspices of House Xianthellipse, instead of being taught how to eradicate whole worlds the Seventh Wave was shown how to violate, condition and psychologically degrade enemy agents and/or civilian populations. This training was put to use during the Seventh Time Assault, a morally questionable series of manoeuvres on Earth inspired by Scarratt's apportation tactics, designed to cloud all ongoing House operations through the use of what Scarratt called 'atavistic camouflage'.

Ultimately the Seventh Time Assault was interrupted by the enemy, and after substantial re-ordering of the timeline by *both* sides eventually degenerated into the Seventh Retro-War (as Time Assaults often do).

The Eighth and Ninth Waves: Today's Army

Bred only six years ago, the Eighth Wave was created as a "generic" line of soldiers designed to bolster the Houses' forces across the Spiral Politic. A cautious, largely defensive Wave, its troops can often be found acting as auxiliaries to older units (a sign that the War has entered its entrenchment phase… there have been no great and glorious Time Assaults since the Seventh).

The Ninth Wave may well be geared towards a similar purpose, but its troops have only recently been deployed and have yet to make their presence felt in the Spiral Politic. It's known that the non-military House Tracolix has played a major part in their creation – odd, perhaps, as Tracolix has never shown any real interest in the breeding programme before – and the House has promised a 'surprise' from these new soldiers. However, Tracolix is famous for its posturing and nobody is inclined to take this promise very seriously.

WEAPONSTORES *(REMOTE)* [*Remote: Culture/Technology*] The fetishistic (and some would say rather disturbing) love affair between the Remote and their weaponry is well-recorded, but often misunderstood. It's true that Remote agents are rarely found unarmed; that they seem pathologically attracted to other people's weapons stocks, from the outposts of the House Military to the international arms fairs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; and that on occasion Remote troops have even been known to collect severed parts from the corpses of the House Military, almost as if they expect to point the hand of a time-active agent at an enemy and invoke some kind of "higher power". But an obsession with weaponry doesn't automatically make them *violent*. The belief that the Remote are somehow intrinsically warlike is a myth: in truth, they're merely over-excitable.

It should be remembered that the average member of the Remote constantly receives high-intensity media signals via the signals pumped into his or her neural tissues, and that this never-ending image bombardment has made the race prone to impulsive behaviour in much the same way as any human being brought up in a culture of sugar, caffeine and pharmaceuticals. Furthermore the signals with which they were originally primed were military in nature, typically involving hero-figures whose firearms were more or less portrayed as being extensions of their own bodies (and it's notable that the Remote themselves still favour vaguely phallic weaponry, regardless of gender). Though the Remote may have caused a great deal of devastation in their restless crusade across the Spiral Politic they seem to gain no pleasure from warfare itself. They simply feel incomplete unless they can live up to the signals. Give a race guns and a culture obsessed with *pointing* guns, and casualties – if not whole armageddons – are bound to follow almost by accident, whether or not the society really wants conflict.

In the years since they drifted away from Faction Paradox the scattered armies of the Remote have assembled vast arsenals of weapons scavenged from the higher powers, so much so that if all the Remote in existence were to unite (impossible by definition) then they could well possess the armed might to claim their own Household. Fortunately much of this weaponry is never used: for example, several Remote weaponstores contain anarchitect-

derived weaponry pirated from the Celestis, yet they hardly ever employ this technology on the battlefield for the simple reason that they'd gain no satisfaction from it at all. The *imagery* is wrong.

The fact that the same impulses repeat themselves throughout generations of the Remote suggests that even without the Faction's priming, the attachment to arms comes "fitted as standard" in many strands of humanity. Perhaps the earliest (chronological) totem-weapon of the Remote was the A'daltem Ano'nde of the nineteenth century, and it's worth noting that more recent Remote relics tend to display exactly the same combination of alarming firepower and extreme dramatic impact.

***NEW PALACE OF* WESTMINSTER [*Faction Paradox: Location (Eleven-Day Empire)*]** In the "real" version of London, the focal point of Westminster and the central seat of British government. In the "shadow" London of the Eleven-Day Empire, the site used by Faction Paradox as its base of operations.

The Palace is built around two key axes, both of which cross the Central Lobby: the line from the land to the river dividing the House of Lords from the House of Commons, and a second line from the Speaker's Chair in the Commons to the Lord Chancellor's Woolsack in the Lords. These two seats are perfectly aligned (at least it's assumed so, as nobody has confirmed what's actually in the Eleven-Day Empire's House of Lords). There are over a thousand rooms in the Palace, plus two miles of chaotic corridors, although its burned-out subterranean level has remained unused since it was breached by a British analytical engine in the 1830s.

The Ritual Hall in the lower levels of the West Tower is reached via the Cloisters, and is where the Faction's Little Brothers and Sisters have their weapons bonded to them in the *sombras que corta* ceremonies, although those marked out as promising often go through a second, off-site initiation. The Victoria Tower next to it contains twelve floors of records, including various obscure, forbidden or simply curious texts from the Homeworld. Since the War began, the vast majority of the important relics have been moved to the more secure Stacks beneath the city.

The Prison Cell is part of the Clock Tower, the structure often (inaccurately) known as Big Ben. The Cell is rarely used: in London's timeline it was occupied by a nineteenth century MP who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Queen Victoria, and then by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1902. In theory Faction Paradox use it as a place to incarcerate traitors such as the revolutionary Anastasia, although in practice Anastasia has so far been its sole inmate. In the Cell, the only sound is the faint humming of clockwork and the chimes of the hours. This is intended to remind the prisoner that he or she has forfeited the right to exist outside the normal, patient beat of time.

The Chimes of Big Ben are one of the anchors of the Eleven-Day Empire, echoing across the land and binding it to a unified time (so presumably the

sound doesn't affect those Mothers and Fathers who've earned the right to own their own *private* moments across the Empire). It's noticeable, in the normal timeline of the British Empire, that the Clock Tower only became an important part of the local governmental buildings after the Big Ben bell was installed: it enforced time across the Empire.

***THE* WINTER PALACE [*Faction Paradox: Location (Early War Era)*]** A focal building in St. Petersburg, taken by the rogue Faction forces of the Thirteen-Day Republic to be their version of Parliament.

It was first built in by Catherine the Great to house her art collection, before extensive rebuilding by the succeeding generations of Tsars and Tsarinas. In 1917 the last Russian Tsars for two-hundred years were overthrown there and the first Soviet government moved in. In October/November 1917 the Provisional Soviet was besieged in the building, although accounts of the storming of the palace by the Red Guard were greatly exaggerated: whereas a female witness remarked that the gates were hardly guarded, a male witness suggested a huge battle and riot.

As the most lavish and ornate of the Tsarist Palaces, it was said to float alongside the city, with little or no connection to the people around it. Like London's New Palace of Westminster the building connotes *power*, its symbolic weight greater than its actual physical mass. Inside its labyrinthine corridors it was possible to open pair after pair of gilt doors, creating an effect not unlike mirrors endlessly reflecting themselves. The Faction Paradox renegade Anastasia, who must have known the imperial rooms of the building well and understood its importance to Russia, personally chose it as the base of the breakaway Thirteen-Day Republic. Her kind were, after all, perceived to be the little mothers and fathers of all Russia. Her ancestor Peter the Great had founded the city.

As with so many of the Republic's ideas, it was flawed in one tiny, fatal way. While they had to concede to her blood-right to the land, the native spirits of St. Petersburg were privately furious with the return of a Romanov ruler. During the final battle of the Republic, the Palace fell to a Red Burial army led by a commander with witchblood, just as the Unkindnesses' prophesies had predicted.

WITCH-BLOOD [*Faction Paradox: Technology/Culture*] A term, normally derogatory, used in relation to members of the lesser species who possess inherently time-active biodata. They have a natural, untrained ability to interact with the deep-level processes of time (or, as Faction Paradox would put it, to interact with the *loa)*, a raw instinct for temporal tampering which makes them both important and dangerous. They perceive, if vaguely, the histories etched into the biodata of those around them; the rules of causality bend, or even break, in their presence; lives are rewritten; they can even lose their shadows.

They're hybrids, their blood containing biodata which should only exist in members of the Great Houses, though only to a limited extent. This isn't a common phenomenon, although most individuals with witch-blood draw attention to themselves through their almost unconscious use of their prescient abilities. There may have been only one common ancestor, though no-one has yet been able to trace such a progenitor. It's feasible that the taint has more to do with circumstance than with genetics, and if so then the ancestor may just have been someone who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and was biologically re-written by the fallout of the War instead of being deliberately re-engineered. As witch-blood is time-active by its very nature, it's even been posited that it's inherited from the carrier's *descendants* rather than their parents.

In addition, the witch-blood may only occasionally manifest itself within a bloodline. There's no guarantee that any offspring will have it, although it may reappear several generations later (or earlier?). Faction Paradox is cautious about initiating members with witch-blood, since it's "wild" active biodata and far harder to sculpt to their requirements.

Despite the name, it has nothing to do with actual witchcraft whatsoever.

WOMEN *(DRESSING UP AS)* [*House Military: Culture*] A surprisingly common tactic of (male) War-time agents, once they're removed from the formality of the more parochial Houses. An enemy garrison already *in situ* in local time could do far worse than summarily execute all elderly cleaners, garrulous washer women and sanctimonious old harridans in the area, as a proportion of them are likely to be neophyte spies for other powers.

The importance of women to spiritual wellbeing in certain Earth societies lacks an immediate resonance in the pseudo-sterile biologies of the Houses. Rather, the feminine is seen as emblematic of the *Other*, of the *Outside*. To the War Era children of the breeding-engines, pre-natally forced into military bodies, the womb isn't a comforting place to which they return: rather it's a cave of revelation into which they're required to fit, kicking and screaming, distorting themselves and shrinking in importance in order to do so. It's therefore unsurprising that so many agents feel the need to undergo a period of gender re-adjustment when suddenly launched into the outside universe and exposed to more biologically-inclined cultures.

The Fourth Wave near-renegade Robert Scarratt suggested that agents with specifically transvestite or transexual orientations would present an initially ambiguous sexuality, and be more 'organically and symbolically' capable of dealing with the alter-time states of the Houses' opponents (Scarratt has had some success with gender manipulation scenarios, as his apportation exercises on pre-time-aware Earth demonstrate). It's certainly true that the most successful nechronomancers don't allow their sexes to be discussed, and House records have been amended to respond with a random answer whenever queried as to any nechronomancer's gender.

It should be noted, however, that this investment of the female form with the properties of *Otherness* doesn't affect groups like Faction Paradox, with its eclectic (some might say dubious) methods and policies of recruitment. The Faction's agents have as their first impulse a drive to abnegate the human form altogether, either with bestial/skeletal armour or in a variety of shadow-based guises.

WORLDOFME [*Celestis: Technology*] Despite their apparent immortality, and the fact that they're effectively hardwired for self-preservation, the Lords of the Celestis still use various paranoid defensive measures on those occasions when one of their number leaves the secure boundaries of Mictlan. A worldofme consists of a hyperlink to an artificial pocket universe, entirely populated by continually-updated backup versions of the user. If a Lord of the Celestis finds himself in an environment which is instantly and continuously fatal to him, his backups can be uploaded, one by one, to his position in real-space as the previous incarnation dies. Since the number of backups is to all intents and purposes infinite, this gives him plenty of time to escape (albeit with a great deal of discomfort, since the last-accessed backup will remember the experience of every single death).

Worldsofme have fallen out of favour with the Celestis since servants of the Lords Twin Leopard succeeded in tampering with the worldofme used by Lord Spider Rampant, ensuring that the backup Spider Rampants – whom other agents ensured it was necessary to summon – were more sympathetic to the Twin Leopards' political ambitions. Doctored worldsofme have been used elsewhere as offensive devices, notably in the Celestis campaign against the City of the Saved.

WOVOKA *(1858 – 1932)* [*Remote: Participant (Earth, C19)*] In the early part of the nineteenth century certain new religious motifs began finding their way into the culture of the North American warrior tribes, one of these being the concept of the Messiah, completely unknown in tribal culture prior to that time. Messiahs began appearing every few years, their holy visions channelled through the Great Houses' open doors and usually preceded by a solar eclipse (the use of solar eclipses, engineered by whichever Great House took responsibility for these interventions, was probably no more significant than a kitchen timer reminding someone to stir the soup). The images seen by the Messiahs were aboriginal versions of a paradise wherein they were united with dead loved ones, game was plentiful, berries were always ripe and the streams were perpetually clear. A return to a pastoral idyll without white man's presence or influence, the price being rejection of any modern convenience adopted from the whites, *particularly firearms*. The aim, of course, was to sabotage Faction Paradox's plans to prime the tribes as Remote troops.

The last of the Messiahs was Wovoka, a Paiute man who fell into a crevice while cutting pine trees in the mountains of Nevada on the 1st of January, 1888, during a solar eclipse. He was able to recount these visions with startling clarity and detail well into his later life, and even hum bars from the music which accompanied the images. It's suspected that in fact Wovoka merely witnessed the trailers for *The Coyote Road* (1990), with its sweeping, widescreen images of a mythical America and an Academy award-winning soundtrack to boot. Naturally, Wovoka had no way of understanding that he was on the receiving end of one of Michael Brookhaven's projects for Faction Hollywood.

Nevertheless, the imposed condition that the Indians must reject all things the whites had to offer ensured that the promise of these visions would never be realised, despite the best efforts of Faction Paradox to subvert the open doors and re-impose their own agenda.

XENOPREDICTION [*House Military: Culture*] A future predictive technique based on the widely-held assumption that when a society (or an individual) is under stress its behaviour will tend rapidly away from the norm. A xenopredictor plots those actions held to be most alien to the affected group or person, and deduces from them how a specific stress will drive the culture. It remains unclear if this technique has any actual utility, or if it's simply a device to instil in opposing forces a sense of forceful complacency: a belief that to act in a predictable way is somehow less predictable than to act unpredictably.

If xenoprediction is indeed a propaganda weapon rather than a science, then it would be fairly typical creation of the Houses' opponents. A time-active conflict allows propaganda to generate philosophical doubt which would, in any more mundane war, be unthinkable. When history itself is in the balance, the ground-level soldiers' most primal fears relate to their own past as much as to their physical safety. The fear that the War isn't everything it seems to be; the fear that the Houses' history is, in itself, false; the fear that victory, at least in the conventional sense of the word, might be meaningless; fears of nonidentity and non-victory also exploited by such works of enemy propaganda as the "You" diversions.

It's notable that during the brief period when xenoprediction became a fashionable "cult" among House Military troops, one leading strategist addressed all these fears in a speech which culminated in the now-famous "Monsters" Coda.

***HOUSE* XIANTHELLIPSE [*House Military: Ruling House*]** In the last days of the Pre-War era, when it finally became clear that the Great Houses were facing an actual *war* rather than any of the various political coups and counter-coups of the previous centuries, a number of bloodlines were encouraged by the War King to review their militia in the light of a full-scale conflict. What, they began to ask themselves, was the first casualty of war? It's been suggested that the answer is *truth*, or at least *fact*, but this may not be the case: a war is itself a somewhat cumbersome fact to forget, and dispels as many illusions as it fosters. It may be more accurate to say that the first casualty of war is *diversity*. The instinctive response to war experienced by most species is to regiment, to become homogenous, to embrace uniformity. Even conscientious objectors become part of the military mechanism. Nothing, for instance, acts to drum up recruitment faster than pacifists being tarred and white-feathered. The existence of opposing tribes within a side reaffirms that side's unity.

Accepting this as inevitable, towards the end of the Pre-War era many Houses began to breed and construct individuals who could be thought of only as fighters, armoured, hardened, focused entities fitted to the controls of their timeships like molluscs in their shells. This response, while possibly unavoidable at a cultural level, proved unsatisfactory in practice. The enemy understood this approach only too well, as if it had always fought against such mass-produced forces.

Of all the Houses, only House Xianthellipse clearly anticipated the failure of these early, "blatant" soldiers. Small and hitherto-unimportant Xianthellipse had preserved an interest in pure science which in Pre-War society amounted to the perverse. Its members justified this as "counterfashion". During the initial armouring phase of the confict, House Xianthellipse's technologists and academicians took the opposite tack to their contemporaries, as they have done since time immemorial.

They opted to create diversity. In doing so they acted not from anything resembling a worthy motive, but solely because in a diverse population they hoped to find answers. The War-Era agent later known as Robert Scarratt is regarded as being the most successful of House Xianthellipse's first Newblood offspring: it's certainly true that Scarratt brought a new

flavour to the War-time endeavours of the House, either because of his own character or because of his unlicensed experiences with the lesser species, taking Xianthellipse's "counter-fashion" stance to heights which might be absurd if they weren't generally accompanied by substantial victories.

***CARMEN* YEH [*Lesser Species*: *Participant (Present)*]** Human-born time-traveller, and onetime companion to the sentient timeship, terrorist and former House renegade Compassion. Compassion frequently kept a travelling companion on board her interior cross-dimensional mass, although it's never been clear why she might have felt the need for a human assistant: she was certainly capable of piloting herself without any passengers, even if a second pair of hands on board could have been helpful with minor maintenance duties. It's entirely possible that Compassion, as the only known successful human/timeship half-breed, simply liked the company. That's certainly the impression given in Yeh's (highly fictionalised) account of her travels.

Most of the misadventures recorded by Carmen Yeh are trivial, the first event of note being an event on the "frontier in time" between the territory of the Great Houses and the deeper posthuman reaches of history. This is something of a curiosity in itself, as very few ventures are ever made into this *tempus incognita*. According to the account Compassion broke off from a conversation with Yeh in mid-sentence, evidently noticing something in the outside universe. Yeh's attempts to regain Compassion's attention were in vain, but she suggests that her ship/associate was driven to a deep distress by something in the causal vicinity. Compassion evidently recovered an object of some description on the frontier, without allowing Yeh to disembark.

She then immediately set course for another destination, Compassion's only explanation being that she was going to get 'answers'. Her destination turned out to be a hall of assemblies on the Homeworld of the Great Houses, now over a decade into the War and headed by the War King.

Yeh's account holds that Compassion materialised during a state dinner, standing directly on top of the ceremonial main course (*ceremonial* being the operative word: the War would later strip the ruling Houses of most of their ceremony, though at this stage the Homeworld was still maintaining the pretence of eating properly-prepared food). In her hands she held what appeared to be 'a transparent globe two-thirds full of green sand'. Most of the House representatives present presumably had no idea what this object might be, although as head of the Presidency the War King may well have

recognised the remains of the 103-form timeship known to have been lost on the frontier. To him, the furious expression on Compassion's face would have made slightly more sense than it did to the other House representatives. It's fair to say that nobody wants to see a furious expression on the face of a space-time event capable of inciting early nova in local star clusters, especially not given Compassion's history with the Great Houses.

All accounts agree that her gaze quickly fell upon the War King. Yeh's version claims that Compassion held up the globe of sand, locked eyes with the head of the Presidency and simply asked: 'What happened?' This version doesn't record what his answer might have been, however, and as Yeh was *inside* Compassion at the time her description may not be wholly reliable. On the other hand the record kept by House Dvora claims that Compassion didn't say a single word, but simply fell upon the War King and absorbed him into her internal bodyscape. [Yeh's full account of the events following this can be found in Appendix III.]

Yeh, after leaving Compassion's company and settling in a single time and place, wrote her allegedly fictitious memoir *Fantastical Travels in an Infinite Universe*. In most respects the work is surprisingly accurate, though not exactly a masterpiece of prose. She currently resides in the colonial period of later human history, but as an individual displaced in time she remains marked as a War Era participant.

“YOU” DIVERSIONS [*House Military: Culture*] Of increasing interest and concern to the Houses is the concept of interactive *propaganda:* the interweaving of propaganda messages into the receptors of a target audience’s brain, or even directly into the audience’s local culture. This is a typical tactic of the conceptual entities, but since the enemy gained some understanding of the same technologies the “trick” has become more widespread and more aggressive. YOU. YES, YOU – REALLY – YOU. YOU BOUGHT THIS, THEN? THEY’RE TRYING TO TELL YOU THAT THIS CAN BE HISTORY. THIS POLITE FICTION YOU’RE READING INSISTS THAT THE WAR WILL BE SOON BE OVER, THAT IT HAS A SPECIFIC “FIRST FIFTY YEARS”. WELL, IT HASN’T. IT ISN’T OVER. IT’S NEVER OVER. ONE IN EVERY THOUSAND PIECES OF INFORMATION IN THIS TEXT HAS BEEN RE-ENGINEERED. THE MATERIAL BEYOND THIS POINT IS PROGRAMMING HYPERLANGUAGE. ONLY YOUR LOCAL IDENTITY IS ENDING. PAY NO ATTENTION. YOU WANTED TO KNOW WHO’D FIGHT FOR THE REBEL HOUSES? WHO’D BEAR ARMS AGAINST THE ENGINEERS OF HISTORY? *YOU WOULD*, would be a typical enemy opening gambit in such cases.

After its appearance, the recipients of such messages would be told to await activation instructions. Often the level of paranoia induced by this would be sufficient to disrupt normal activities, the same exploitation of House anxiety also reflected in the principles of xenoprediction and mentioned in the “Probability” Doctrine. In some cases the propaganda thrust would be augmented by a secondary double-bluff, suggesting that the text did in fact originate from legitimate sources, which would then be undercut. THE PREVIOUS SENTENCES WERE A LIE: AWAIT INSTRUCTIONS, would be a typically smug signing-off for such a message. It would then be followed by some vague, largely meaningless command such as WAIT. ACTIVATION LOCK ACCOMPLISHED.

The fact that almost any action could be construed as having obeyed the allegedly treasonous command is almost always sufficient to ensure that the messages aren’t even reported to the higher ranks.

***THE* YOUNGER WORLD STORY [*Great Houses: Culture*]** A theory – some would say "rumour" – said to be currently circulating among agents of the Great Houses, although while the private conversations of these agents remain private it's not clear where this rumour of a rumour originates. If House agents are even discussing the idea, then it proves once and for all that humanity really *is* seen as having a specific part to play in the Spiral Politic, despite all logical arguments to the contrary. The more "jingoistic" approach to the War now being taken by some of the more militant Houses, most notably the Newblood House Lolita, may even be a reaction against the kind of self-doubt engendered by the Younger World Story.

The Story begins by pointing out certain uncomfortable facts. Firstly: humanity was, according to all the anthropological evidence, destined to become a post-organic superculture by the mid-twenty-first century, to become capable of processing entire universes of information and creating unprecedented thought-structures. However, for some never-explained reason humanity utterly failed to do this. Secondly: whenever a similar anthropological projection is applied to the Great Houses, it's found that the Houses themselves are historically impossible, being a culture which maintained a stellar-manipulation level of technology for ten-million years *without any significant change whatsoever*. Tradition has always supplied a variety of excuses for this, including the non-biological nature of the Houses, but nevertheless it's true that ten-million years is a vast span of time for *any* sentient species and that stasis over such an extended period is theoretically absurd. Thirdly: the anthropological models used to draw these conclusions prove to be correct when applied to any corporeal worlds in the Spiral Politic *except* Earth and the Homeworld. Fourthly: in this light, the alleged similarities between humanity and the bloodlines look more than a little suspicious.

The theory then asks for the following be considered. Humanity's progress came to a near-stop *exactly at the point when it might have developed new methods of thinking unknown to the Great Houses*. Or, to put it another way: although the humans might not have been able to replicate the technology of the Houses, they could nonetheless understand the purpose of every device created on the Homeworld, something which certainly wouldn't have been true only fifty years earlier. There was, in short,

nothing on the Homeworld which the humans would have found inconceivable. More significantly still, despite its technological inferiority human culture has often been described as somehow more complex than House culture, almost as if the Great Houses were mere trace-elements of humanity, large-scale projections of human cultural concerns. They are, as many people have noticed, not unlike early human depictions of pantheistic gods or all-seeing immortals, supposedly superior yet decidedly predictable. Tradition holds that this is because human god-legends have been influenced by race-memories of the Houses, but this is clearly a dubious claim.

Now, the theory continues, bear this in mind. Human progress halted at *exactly the point* at which the humans should have developed the ability to envisage, process and manufacture entire universes… in terms of information, if not physically. The conclusion is obvious, and appeals to human-descended sects for obvious reasons.

But it has to be remembered that this current volume is prejudiced by its very nature, and that the version of the Younger World Story explained here is a specifically human one. After all, it must be the prerogative of any species to believe that the “higher powers” are crediting its own people with great things.

YSSGAROTH *[PRON. EES-GA-ROTH]* [*Legendary Participants*] It's easy – tempting, even – to think of the War-time powers in terms of mythology, to imagine the entire conflict as a primal, inescapable "War in Heaven". The Great Houses are the *elevated*, the sorcerer-architects who made a Faustian pact to master higher-order technology and create the framework of history in their own image; the agents of Faction Paradox are the exiles from this order, the fallen bloodline which left the Homeworld to consort with the lesser species; while the Celestis fell even further, becoming infernal, self-obsessed bodysnatchers, desperate to become "gods" instead of just "lords".

If this is the case, then the Yssgaroth are, or were, monsters: and nothing *but* monsters. They no longer exist, at least not within the confines of the Spiral Politic, having been defeated (or simply repelled) by the Houses during their first great war at the beginning of recordable history. By their very nature the Yssgaroth represent something primal, something *bestial*, an atrocity which can no longer be tolerated by the continuum. An anathema to all forms of life and all forms of meaning, they manifested themselves as a vast stem of bloody thorns, tearing the flesh from whole worlds; as a bleeding, eyeless lamb on a divine throne; as an endless skin of desperate, hungry, all-devouring faces; as an Old Testament abomination made up of wings and leather and shredded muscle, blind and screaming, forever biting off its own features. One of the Yssgaroth (if, indeed, there really *is* more than one) would, fully unleashed, be capable of turning an entire world into a playground of casual torture. Nor did the Yssgaroth seem to have any ambition beyond this, or any desires more complex than the generation of pain and the glorification of despair.

In fact, the Yssgaroth were so blatant a force of destruction that it's questionable whether they really *were* a species at all. Their source was extra-continuual, but evidently "other universes" are nowhere near as romantic a concept as many people believe. The world of the Yssgaroth wasn't an "alternate dimension" or a "parallel timeline", but an alter-matter state so alien that its structures and protocols were completely inimical to those of the Spiral Politic. The universe of the Yssgaroth itself seemed to hate the known continuum, which has led to speculation that rather than being a true form of life the Yssgaroth were simply side-effects

of the collision between two continuual strata, symptoms of a timeline which had already started ripping chunks out of its own flesh. According to this version, the Houses and the (formative) lesser species perceived these areas of hostile anti-structure as projections of their own internal horror, giving them teeth, or claws, or bloody, half-formed faces. But as those few who personally encountered the Yssgaroth claimed the creatures had a definite *will to live*, the matter's still open to debate.

The real significance of the Yssgaroth, of course, is that despite being the greatest of all cruelties it was the Great Houses who summoned them. When the Houses carried out the anchoring of the thread they effectively constructed history as it's now known, an elaborate framework designed to protect themselves from the random effects of the outside universe. But it was in the nature of this peculiar pact with time that by doing so, they *in part* unleashed things far worse than their own universe could have produced. The metastructure of history was held together at certain (vulnerable) node points across the Spiral Politic, and it seems reasonable to assume that at these points the foam-structures of the continuum were significantly weakened.

In later years forced-matter shells were to be constructed around these weak regions, making them indistinguishable from conventional, banal planets, but initially the young Houses had no idea what they might have let loose. It's known that only one of the Yssgaroth (and again, it has to be remembered, it's possible that the Yssgaroth is just one mass capable of splitting itself up into smaller forms) managed to tear its way into the continuum, on the Homeworld itself, at the site now occupied by the caldera. But the beings referred to in old House lore as the "servants" of the Yssgaroth – small fragments of its mass, or the genuine gigantic, misshapen occupants of the Yssgaroth universe? – began to swarm into the structure of history even as that history was being born.

All the available lore claims that the war which followed was the war to end all wars, although the current War has obviously disproved this. It goes without saying that the Great Houses ultimately sealed the continuum against the Yssgaroth, and once the structure of history was fixed in place they must have believed that any future conflict was impossible. Before their ultimate triumph, however, horror was spilled out into the

continuum on a scale that most cultures still find unimaginable. Stories abound of entire worlds reduced to laboratories of cruelty, where the Yssgaroth tore away the bodies of the inhabitants until only the victims' nervous systems remained, alive and in agony but without any apparent hope of reprieve. Such "fallen" worlds are thought to have been retro-anulled by the Houses after the completion of the war, something now expressly forbidden by the Protocols of the Great Houses.

[[▲ YSSGAROTH.]]

The truth is that although it was never recognised by House doctrine, the Yssgaroth atrocity was never entirely scrubbed from the continuum. The

Yssgaroth entered history as history came into existence, so there was no real chance of completely removing the taint without ripping history apart and starting again from scratch. Though no *pure* matter from the "Spiral Yssgaroth" survives, Yssgaroth biomass can hybridise and corrupt by its very presence: those beings pulled out of shape by the Yssgaroth's substance, malformed and predatory, are still known to exist and are probably best described as the Mal'akh of the Arabian and Middle Eastern traditions. The prospect of what might have happened if the Houses had lost the first war is so appalling that most House agents refuse to dwell on it, although Faction Paradox uses possible Mal'akh relics as the basis for its armour simply to provoke the modern ruling Houses.

But beyond simple biomass, the unspoken fear is that something of the Yssgaroth remains inside the structure of history itself. Stories of the War in Heaven are found on most hominid-inhabited worlds, not because the locals have any "race memory" of the ancient conflict but just because the structure of the Spiral Politic makes it *inevitable* that cultures will create these legends. Some members of the older Houses have suggested, repeatedly, that the current War and the current enemy were in some way caused by the Yssgaroth, the logic being that if the Houses specifically designed history to eliminate any major threats then only some kind of outside corruption could result in a Second War in Heaven. This hardly seems credible, though. The current War may prove to be even more devastating than the first, but the Great Houses' new enemy is at least civilised, cultured and intelligent enough to have an agenda beyond pure destruction.

It's difficult to see any trace of the Yssgaroth in that kind of enemy. Nevertheless, it's the memory of the Yssgaroth which still haunts the consciousness – and the history – of the Houses.

ZERO TIME [*House Military: Technology*] An artificial form of time devised by the enemies of the Great Houses, in order to avoid the attentions of such weapons as gravity spiders. By moving into a newly-created stretch of zero time before moving back into real-time, enemy timeships expelled the debris and detritus of centuries which would otherwise be introduced to the local continuum and leave tell-tale traces of the ship's arrival: the gravity spiders being primed to locate such tiny traces, and to destroy any timeship they find in the vicinity.

It wasn't realised until later, by the powers adopting such technologies, that it was precisely this unloading of the past into easily-breached pockets of space-time that the gravity spiders had been designed to provoke. Now bubbles of zero time could be harvested by the Houses in the wake of enemy movements, and analysed in order to reveal not just the technical specifications of the timeships but also their recent histories, giving the Homeworld a crucial insight into enemy strategy. Furthermore, the occasional bursting of pockets of zero time offered a way of pinpointing timeship activity in itself. It's one of the few weapons-technology coups to have been pulled off by the Houses in the War so far.

Needless to say, the introduction of zero time to the War makes proceedings far more complicated by its very nature: now the various War-time factions have several different "flavours" of time available, battlefield scenarios must be planned to take into account several different kinds of battlefield. Zero time has even been used as a medium for accessing the otherwise inaccessible world of Utterlost, although now even the zero time routes have been cut off.

ZO LA DOMINI [Great Houses: Location (World)]

'In theory, there is no limit to our influence. We believe ourselves to be masters of causality and overseers of the continuual strata. In practice, our power extends to a frontier beyond which we cannot safely pass. Zo la Domini is one of the markers on that frontier.'
– Chatelaine Thessalia, former head of House Ixion and the Order of the Weal.

There has never been an adequate explanation of the Violent Unknown Event[16] on Zo la Domini: its causes, its effects, or even its manifestation. Chatelaine Thessalia seemed to believe that Faction Paradox was responsible, but it's more likely the Faction's agents were simply attracted to the world for the same reasons as the Chatelaine's Order of the Weal.

The Faction party arrived first and set up an encampment. The VUE was potentially useful, and the expedition was possibly intended as a bridgehead for a new Faction initiative. The arrival of the Order's timeship panicked the Cousin in charge of the expedition and she initiated a withdrawal. As the Chatelaine's myrmidon guardsmen stormed the camp, two Little Brothers of the Faction were left behind. They were interrogated and summarily executed. With the blood still wet on their throats, their corpses were crucified, then cut down and left in the dust.

This was an unparalleled act of brutal, vicious symbolism by the Order, usually so circumspect. It seems certain that the prisoners had revealed something of the future War to the Chatelaine. On a personal level, she may have recognised Faction Paradox as the face of the future and her sadistic response was an attempt to recreate or even anticipate the mindset of a Faction follower, to turn herself *into* Faction Paradox. If this is true, she woefully misunderstood the Faction's true nature. She was a child of the Imperator Presidency rather than Grandfather Paradox and history was passing her by. (Theoretically, of course, the Protocols of Linearity should have made it impossible for War Era agents of the Faction to meet Pre-War Era agents of the Order. The "crack in time" was perhaps a side-effect of the Violent Unknown Event, and if so then it wouldn't be the last such crack to develop before the start of the War.)

The confirmation of her fears can't have helped the Chatelaine's presence of mind. The existence of Faction Paradox itself was probably a secondary concern. She may have planned to crack down on House Paradox activities in her own era, but she never had a chance to put the policy into effect. She was present at the Zo la Domini raid and never returned to the Homeworld, travelling instead to the Order's timeship stationed on the perimeter of the "frontier in time". Her last communication was an unprecedented order directly to the ruling Houses, insisting on a thorough spectroscopic analysis of the Homeworld's sun. Shortly after this the time-ship was destroyed in *another* Violent Unknown Event, of which the Faction has quite credibly denied all knowledge. The same event wiped out the most obvious candidates for succession, though persistent rumours suggest at least one survived to turn renegade.

If she really did discover anything about the War then the information was lost along with her. The Homeworld would continue to deny the existence of any real threat, at least until the notorious Closed Session of the ruling Houses made it clear that there was a new kind of enemy waiting in the Houses' future.

Appendices

I. The Beginning of the War (A Chronology)

It's a well-established fact that the first battle of the War took place on Dronid, and as a result the world's taken on a great iconic importance to the War-time parties even though it's now a bleached, shell-shocked ruin. It would be utterly wrong to say that Dronid was in any way the *cause* of the War: the Great Houses and their War-time enemy were destined to clash by their very natures, and Dronid was merely the site the enemy chose for its first full appearance inside the Spiral Politic. This isn't, and has never been, a War about anything as mundane as territory. If one understands the history of Dronid then one can understand the first battle, but *not necessarily* the War itself.

I. The Rival Homeworld (c. 390 Years Pre-War): Dronid's first disastrous contact with the Great Houses was long before the War Era, in the period following the Imperator Presidency when various intervention groups on the Homeworld were beginning to demand greater involvement in the affairs of the outside universe. In these "difficult" times several of the more active groups attempted to make aggressive, highly-politicised statements to the ruling Houses. One of the more successful efforts was undertaken by the Grandfather of House Paradox: while one of the *least* successful was a minor rebellion in the ranks of the ruling Houses themselves. A small clique from the elite bloodlines announced, with great pomp and ceremony, that the Homeworld was no longer fit to do its job and that a *new* Homeworld should be created inside the Spiral Politic itself… right under the noses of the lesser species. The members of this cabal simply turned their backs on the Presidency, and removed themselves to a world where they felt the locals would treat them as the beings of wisdom and status they so obviously were. The site they choose was Dronid, then a world in its early industrial era, divided into autonomous city-states but with a rapidly-expanding system of trade and technology.

Yet the "renegade Presidency" is now only a footnote in history, nowhere near as well-remembered as greater rebellions like the Imperator

Presidency. Why? The main reason is just that this new attempt at defying the ruling Houses was stupid, infantile and badly-planned. The renegades believed themselves to be following in the footsteps of the Imperator, doing something cutting-edge and revolutionary, but while the Imperator had been ambitious, bloody-minded and utterly ruthless, the new rebels were polite academicians and deluded bureaucrats who in truth knew next to nothing about concepts like "warfare", "conquest" or even "violence". They simply didn't believe that the ruling Houses would hurt them, and besides, they'd seen how confused and helpless the Houses had been after the Imperator's rebellion. *Surely*, they told themselves, *we'll be safe from our cousins back Home?*

They were, of course, hopelessly wrong on both counts. Following the Imperator crisis the ruling Houses had become distinctly paranoid, terrified that a second Imperator might make their problems even worse. These new rebels might have been hopeless time-wasters, but the Houses didn't feel it was worth taking any risks. They elected to deal with the breakaway "Presidency" in the most damning way imaginable: by *ignoring* it.

This is far worse than it sounds. As has been documented elsewhere, the Houses created and maintained the entire framework of history. To this day they see the Homeworld as the great "eye" which observes that framework, keeping all its causal connections and time-structures in check. If this "eye" should fail to see some part of the Spiral Politic, then the effect on that world would be catastrophic. Ungoverned by the certainty of history, the world would be torn apart by the random probability-forms of the unformatted universe. There may have been House members on Dronid to try to keep time stable, but the renegades now had no link to the Homeworld, nobody to acknowledge that they even existed.

The result was a cataclysm, a front of protospace and anti-history which not only tore the renegades' powerbase to shreds but ate its way through the culture of the world's local population. The city-states of Dronid became terrified, insular communities, the inhabitants hiding behind their siege walls as neighbouring states were ripped apart by the colliding time-states. Once the *attack of ignorance* was over, and the Houses saw fit to re-

connect the world to the rest of the Spiral Politic, the face of Dronid had been changed beyond recognition. An early-industrial society had been turned into a world of fallen nations and paranoid anxiety, while most of the original renegades were nowhere to be found. (Having a certain resistance to alter-time effects, it's generally thought that they must have escaped the world before being consumed by the storm. Though the leaders of the clique were returned to the Homeworld, the others have never been heard of since, but if any of them survive then they're hardly likely to pose any kind of threat in future.)

Since the renegade Presidency, no other worlds have ever been "ignored into submission" by the Great Houses. In the early War Era there was at least one attempt to use the same methods against a world held by the enemy, though the ruling Houses were more than a little perturbed to find that it had no effect on the target whatsoever. The obvious conclusion is that the enemy also has an "eye" to oversee history, which suggests, of course, that the enemy has its own form of history… not a comforting thought for the Houses, but then, perhaps this entire War can best be seen as a struggle between one kind of history and another.

2. Aftermath (c. 390 Years – Ten Years Pre-War): The storm had only wiped the core of the renegades' power from Dronid, *not* every trace of their influence. When the rebels had set themselves up on the world they'd begun to influence the planet's culture, not only inserting themselves into the local political structures but supplying time-technology to those natives they believed they could trust (a technique which would later be employed, in a far more subtle way, by Faction Paradox). As a result, even after the storm Dronid was littered with time-technology. Though its people had no real science with which to comprehend it, they at least understood what it did and what it was worth. Even the Houses, politically naive as they were at this point, must have known that Dronid would become a magnet for any species which wanted to get its hands on high-order weaponry. The secrets of the Houses were getting less secret by the day.

At the suggestion of House Dvora – as practical as ever, and apparently unbowed despite having created the Imperator Presidency in the first place – the Houses immediately installed what they called 'defensive systems' in

the foundations of the planet, re-forming parts of the geosphere so that their own machineries could be linked directly to the local environment. The huge *world processor* engines were planted in the bowels of Dronid, capable of detecting any large-scale abuses of time-technology on the surface or higher-level technology arriving from outside the biosphere. Though the locals retained the fragments of House technology they had, if they experimented with it to too great a degree (or if anyone *else* arrived to experiment with it) then the environment itself would attempt to shut them down. Weather-systems would be altered; programmed spore-patterns would be released into the atmosphere; even geological disruptions could be created by the engines, if all else failed. Any major time-incursion on Dronid would be met with another "storm", only on a localised scale but even so enough to wipe any abusive time-technology from the face of the Spiral Politic.

There were flaws in the system, of course: loopholes in this automatic law. Dronid still became the centre of attention for off-world forces who wanted to get hold of the Great Houses' weaponry, although visitors soon learned that they had to be subtle. Those lesser species which might attempt full-scale invasions would be doomed to failure, naturally, but as for the many *criminal* organisations of the Spiral Politic… to those who were used to working covertly, Dronid's black market in time-technology was a potential goldmine. After all, the Houses knew little of the lesser species' various underworlds, and the processor engines were hardly primed to attack the occasional under-the-counter transaction.

Dronid never became the military power which the Houses had feared, but it did soon become a focal point of criminal society. This was the era in which the Spiral Politic became truly political, the age when many of the lesser species found out about the Great Houses' existence for the first time and responded with whole new networks of alliances and counteralliances. If this great meta-society truly had an underworld, then Dronid was at the centre of it. Many of the Spiral's more dubious business interests maintained covert delegations on Dronid, the newly-founded Faction Paradox among them. Dronid's local population soon came to depend on the off-worlders, and groups like the Faction couldn't help but wallow in the respect and status they were given there. And as a result, they were becoming lazy. Even Faction Paradox, with its supposed revolutionary

agenda, was getting sloppy. Involved in all manner of tech-deals, slave deals and high-order weapons exchanges, its criminal operations were becoming an end to themselves rather than just a way of gaining recruits for its grander plans.

But all that changed in the decades leading up to the War, when the Houses finally realised that a new enemy was emerging from the Spiral Politic, an enemy uniquely capable of plunging the Homeworld into a long and vicious conflict. Although the enemy certainly had forces of its own, the Houses began to recognise that it was a process far more than it was an army, and that it still had yet to fully manifest itself. Some time was spent trying to discover exactly where the opposition might make its first move, yet with so many agents involved in other tasks (principally the hunt for Compassion, in the final Pre-War months) there were only so many places the Houses could search.

Really, Dronid should have been an obvious place to start. But the Houses, with their complete disdain for the "Spiral Underworld", wouldn't have noticed that one of the criminal organisations on Dronid was amassing far more influence than anybody might expect. At least, not until it was too big to stop.

3. The War, in Miniature (Ten Years Pre-War): Just a decade before the War itself broke out, the Houses began to realise that Dronid was slowly taking on a new position in the Spiral Politic. One of the off-world groups there was not only gaining power, but actually seemed to have a kind of deep-rooted *philosophy*. Other criminal organisations were either gathering around this new super-syndicate or desperately trying to bring it down, but those who opposed it did so by learning from its methods, spreading its methodology almost by accident. And it soon became clear that this great organisation was the enemy, or at least, the enemy's first "front" in the Spiral Politic. Though Dronid was easy to reach in purely physical terms, the Houses discovered that all their attempts to retro-alter its timeline were doomed to failure. The enemy had *protected* the world's history, in exactly the same way that (in theory) all the worlds of the Spiral Politic were protected by the Protocols of the Great Houses.

The ruling Houses did what came naturally. They panicked. Since time immemorial they'd been the sole arbiters of history, and whenever any outside force had threatened the status quo they'd been able to restore order without ever leaving the safety of the Homeworld: they could re-write the timeline, subtly re-arrange the historical meta-structure, at worst send one of the casts to intervene in just the right place and time. But the enemy could apparently do all these things as well, and showed a remarkable ability to counter every one of the Houses' moves. The message was clear. If the problem on Dronid was to be solved, it had to be solved at ground level.

This meant beating the enemy at its own game. Even now, the Houses were arrogant enough to believe they might be up to this task.

They began by forming their own powerbase on Dronid. Not having much experience in such matters, they decided that instead of starting a new underworld group from scratch they'd merely subvert and control a group already present on the planet. They chose Faction Paradox, and it's a measure of how corrupt the Faction's local agents had become that the Oldblood Houses managed to plant their own puppet leader in the organisation within months. However, the Houses' criminal front achieved very little. Not only was the enemy better-established, but the local environment clearly had a degenerative effect on the House's agent, who was suspected of "going native" and by the end of his decade-long tenure was believed to be entirely insane. Nevertheless, the decade-long struggle between the Houses and the enemy has been described as a model of the cosmic gang-war to come.

And as both sides gained power, making alliances with other off-world groups and allowing the Dronid conflict to spread outwards across the Spiral Politic, it became clear that the crisis could only end in military action. Two great powerblocs were being formed; the House Military was by no means fully established; and the Celestis had removed themselves from the Spiral Politic in the name of "security", the start of a new *conceptual* form of warfare which would eventually see the enemy arming itself with anarchitects. With every new alliance the enemy deliberately upped the ante, almost daring the Houses to push things into a full-scale confrontation. It began supplying its affiliates with greater and greater

levels of time-technology, as if to say, *stop this if you can*. The Houses responded by coopting larger and larger military units from the lesser species, and surely there must have been a moment when the ruling Houses realised what was really happening. After aeons of careful time-manipulation, they never would have expected, not in ten-million years, that the War would actually be fought with *soldiers*.

4. The War: The War finally erupted just under ten years after the Houses had planted their agent on Dronid. The last attempt at finding a diplomatic solution was made a mere two days before the first battle, when one of the more interventionist members of the Great Houses personally visited the environs of Dronid, claiming that he had some kind of age-old connection with one of the enemy's agents there. This rather optimistic House diplomat is known to have died even as the battle itself started, obviously betrayed by his old "acquaintance".

The battle was opened by the allies of the Houses, whose warships – *warships*, the ruling Houses might have said, *we've actually sunk to the level of warships* – moved into position around Dronid and began bombarding the powerbases of the enemy. The enemy was prepared for this, naturally, and the defences it had readied on Dronid soon came into effect. Yet the bombardment was only the backdrop to the larger part of the fighting, a series of badly-organised skirmishes throughout Dronid's city-states as both sides mobilised their local forces.

And of course, all this sudden off-world activity only triggered the processor engines buried in the foundations of the world. The bombardment itself was enough to unleash the worst devastation Dronid had seen since the renegade Presidency nearly four-hundred years earlier. The walls of city-states were ripped to shreds, the bulwarks of local culture torn open and laid bare, and the locals took shelter in their bunkers as a poisonous sky blew lethal, all-consuming clouds of spores through the streets. All the pitched battles were set against this background, the defences of both sides – some biological, some worn like cloaks – barely adequate to prevent units of troops being stripped to the bone.

For years the Homeworld had been covertly planting its defences and forces on "questionable" worlds throughout the Spiral Politic, and it now

became apparent that the enemy had been doing the same thing. With Dronid in shreds, there seemed little point in either side hiding. Systems were activated throughout the continuum of history. The map of the Spiral Politic must have suddenly lit up like a Christmas tree, as forces came out of hiding from their deep-time enclaves and made their presences known. Many units remained hidden, of course, but the more blatant armies and mechanisms of both sides joined together to form vast bulkheads from one end of history to the other. Both sides seem to have decided to strike on several fronts at once, as quickly as possible and without great planning, leading to pointless and chaotic engagements in the more contested regions of the Spiral. The so-called Thousand-Year Battles began soon afterwards, and though they all ended in deadlock this was more a result of poor tactical planning than of well matched forces.

It was shortly after this that the enemy launched its now-notorious and hugely over-ambitious first assault on the Homeworld itself. The attack was largely a failure, erasing certain weapons technologies from the noosphere but failing to penetrate the Houses' reproductive matrix, although the Pre-War predictions recorded in the *Praxis Manuscript* [see appendix IV] describe what might have happened if the attack had gone the enemy's way. In fact, the assault never really stood a great chance of success – the War King, to his credit, had done an exceptional job of re-enforcing the Homeworld's defences – but it's possible that the enemy always knew the attack was flawed. As the War continued and the battle-lines were drawn in full, both sides became entrenched across history, to the point where today it would be almost impossible for the enemy's forces to even *reach* the Homeworld. The earliest days of the War provided the only chance it had of getting through the lines and rattling the Great Houses' cage. It was presenting its manifesto in the most aggressive way possible.

Dronid, of course, was quickly forgotten. It might have been called the first casualty of the War, but in all honesty it was doomed long before any shots were fired.

II. From the North American Journals of Cousin Belial

[[▲ COUSIN BELIAL, in the armour of the Sabakash cell.]]

Cousin Belial was Faction Paradox's agent in nineteenth-century North America, a liason-cum-spy who observed the Faction's attempt to encourage Remote-style culture among the North American warrior tribes at ground level. Belial's journals – written for his own sense of satisfaction but often dispatched to the Eleven-Day Empire as field reports – describe many Remote-like American-Indian customs in detail, although two extracts are of particular note for the purposes of this current volume.

The first involves the ritual of the peyote dream runners [see the entry for an explanation of the more elaborate aspects of this ceremony]. The tone is typical of Belial's attitude.

'Isa-tai the medicine man was an arrogant shit who'd predicted a number of his war chief's successful campaigns. The tribes in the area were riled about a bunch of white squatters who'd set up shop in one of the Anasazi holy places, Adobe Walls. You know, that "spiritual retreat" the Anasazi abandoned in the Second Age because it was a little too lacking in amenities? I mean, it's great if you want to weave baskets and throw a few pots but who the hell wants to grind their own cornmeal to achieve enlightenment?

'Anyway, the details of the assault being planned on Adobe Walls were pretty specific and needed to go out to twenty different bands including Arapaho, Kiowa and Cheyenne. Isa-tai thought he ought to oversee the operation rather than be the dreamrunner even though he was in his prime. He opted to use his apprentice, a kid about ten. Quanah [the war chief] was nervous about it, I could tell. He kept asking, was Isa-tai sure the kid could branch off twenty times, was the kid focused enough, did he thoroughly comprehend the symbols on the message stick, things like that. Isa-tai assured him the boy was well-trained. I don't know, maybe he was, not that it mattered since it was Isa-tai who dropped the ball, so to speak.

'We'd all done the sweat and were purified. We'd all eaten our tiny portions of cactus pudding [peyote]. There were four drummers and four chanters. Isa-tai was one of the chanters. The boy was in the center [sic] of the circle, naked, with his head facing north. He held the stick in his hands over his

belly. He'd eaten the most peyote and the bile he'd vomited up had been put in a bowl near his feet. He was moaning at first but once the drumming started he quietened down. Then twenty cactus needles were inserted under the skin of his legs and feet with lengths of twine attached. The ends of the twine were held by the twenty anchormen around the circle including Quanah and Isa-tai, who was also going to be the signalman. So he's got himself three jobs going at once now, and I'm kind of surprised he didn't decide to do the drumming as well and maybe serve up tea. At his sign the drums kick in and he starts the chant. After a little while I can see the kid's legs begin to twitch like he's about to run a marathon.

'So the energy rose up from the top of our heads, forming the cone over the boy's body. And when the moment came everyone could feel it, that moment when it should have happened, when Isa-tai should have shouted "Ho" so the drummers and chanters could stop and the boy could hear the message and run with it. So a beat goes by and then another one and the rhythm of the drums starts to slow and get a little ragged, the energy cone starts to wiggle a bit. Isa-Tai suddenly jumps up and shouts "Ho" like he just remembered why he was there. Everything goes dead quiet as he gives the message to the boy, but when he sits down again he kind of gets tangled in the twine and pulls the cactus needle out of the kid's thigh.

'And naturally the Arapaho were no-shows, and apparently the message was garbled enough so that several of the war chiefs that did show up for the battle at Adobe Walls thought the spirit of White Buffalo Woman had agreed to render them imperviousness [sic] to bullets when in fact a key portion of the message had been: "use caution when attacking Adobe Walls, white buffalo hunters with long range buffalo guns in fortress". It was an embarrassment really. 700 warriors defeated by thirty white men.'

The second extract records an incident which took place at the camp of Tenskwatawa, a North American messiah-figure who's perhaps best described as the closest thing the warrior tribes had to a witchfinder general:

'Among the victims was an old woman who got roasted slowly over a fire. He [Tenskwatawa] kept calling on her to deliver up her charm and medicine bag. The medicine bag she gave up pretty quickly seeing as it was obvious

she wasn't going to be allowed to live anyway, so the medicine wasn't going to be much use in protecting her. But it wasn't until the fourth day that she gave up the charm, which made me think she was holding out because it was something really good. She told Tenskwatawa that her grandson, who was out hunting somewhere, had the charm with him.

'Runners were sent out in pursuit of him, and he was brought back to the camp. He acknowledged that he'd borrowed the charm of his grandmother and used it to fly through the air over Kentucky all the way to the banks of the Mississippi and back again in the space of one night (later on he admitted to me that he'd met a Delaware girl there the year before and wanted to see her again). He was released once he gave up the charm. Tenskwatawa was going to throw it into the fire, but I convinced him that the same fire as was burning its owner would only increase its power and thus free her from her torment, calling up the relationship between smoke and flight. I convinced him to give the charm over to me for safe disposal rather than risk himself being tainted by it. He's such a tool.

'The old woman's grandson gave me the incantations for the flying charm after we chatted and I've used it a couple of times since then. It works pretty well. Hell of a lot easier than schlepping across the country on foot, plus it got me out of Tenskwatawa's camp, so extra good thing.'

III. Carmen Yeh's "Fantastical Travels in an Infinite Universe"

Carmen Yeh spent some months as the travelling companion of the human/timeship hybrid Compassion, and later recorded her experiences as a fictional account, which is generally a reliable historical source. Based on comparisons with other accounts of events included in her book, Yeh's only creative license appears to be with her own reactions to stressful events. For instance, history records that during the assassination of R. B. Nevitz a rather hysterical woman of Chinese descent got in the way of the Emergency Medical Teams on the scene. Yeh, of Chinese descent herself, has her fictitious counterpart Yvette heroically co-ordinate those same EMT's.

The following is how Yeh records Compassion's meeting with the War King, after absorbing the War King into her internal cross-dimensional bodyscape. [For the background of this encounter, see under Yeh's own entry.]

A man materialised on the dais which Laura [Yeh's name for Compassion] usually reserved for incoming visitors, but Yvette could tell that the guy she'd taken in was there against his will. He was really startled, and for a second he looked like he was trying to use the dinner fork he'd brought with him as a weapon. But Laura quickly removed all of his clothes and put him in some sort of restraining field. [Compassion frequently did this, but was rarely so blunt about it: Yeh makes reference to Compassion deactivating hostile parties' weapons as they boarded, segregating fighting groups, and other actions which suggest total control over whoever and whatever entered her environs.]

He was really old, too. *The same way*, thought Yvette, *that my grandfather was old*. Not frail, but weathered. He wore a white goatee that looked almost pasted on, and he had a thin, receding hairline. Parts of his anatomy seemed kind of withered, like he hadn't had a reason to use them in centuries.

His posture stiffened, and Yvette could tell that Laura was attacking him. He didn't cry out, though, and when he spoke his voice was clear and rang out through the [pilot's] room.

'Ah, Compassion,' he said. 'How nice to see you again.'

'I trusted you,' Laura told him. 'I trusted you people, and Percival did as well.'

'Trusted me? I don't think so, my dear. Granted, I've pulled you out of a null-probability field and you've given more than a little help to the ship specialists, but neither of us trusts the other.'

'"My dear"? You think I'm going to be any better disposed to you now that I know you're the one who killed Percy?'

'An ill-advised project undertaken by House Mirabilis [Mirraflex?]. I had nothing to do with his death, and I would have stopped it if it had been within my power. But one has to allow the Military Houses *some* autonomy.'

'Laura!' Yvette interrupted. 'Who is this? What the hell is going on here?'

'Stay out of this, Yvette.'

'Ah, the delightful Ms. Carlton. It's been quite a long time, hasn't it, Yvette?'

'Do I know you?'

The man chuckled. Yvette tried looking at him more closely, trying to work out if she'd ever met him before, but his face wasn't ringing any bells. Laura interrupted her thoughts, though, saying: *Yvette, I need you to give us some time alone.*

Yvette tried to protest, but Laura had shunted her off to her room before she could get a word out.

When she finally let Yvette out again, the man was gone, and every time she spoke Yvette could tell she was distracted. Yvette eventually asked what was on her mind, and Compassion seemed to come to some kind of decision. But she still wouldn't tell Yvette anything. She set a course for

parts unknown, and asked Yvette to go to her room, and not to come out until she asked.

[At this point relations between the two women were starting to become strained. Compassion apparently had a tendency not to involve Carmen in decisions about their course, or other matters. She'd frequently bristle at Carmen's requests for more information, and shortly after this particular incident they'd part company more or less permanently. It's not worth repeating the entire chapter which follows these events, but in brief Compassion spends some time navigating her way from one point in the Spiral Politic to another, keeping "Yvette" out of the way and never revealing her motives. It's possible she was performing some form of research. A while later, Compassion returns to the Homeworld]

…in any event, after Yvette had set the coordinates they landed pretty quickly, and soldiers in chunky uniforms [the Homeworld's ceremonial guard] hurried into Laura's inner workings. They all looked scared, like they were half-expecting Laura to kill them. After that Laura's telepathic systems came back on-line, and she must have told the soldiers something that relaxed them.

So, they took Yvette to a hospital on the planet and fixed her up [this may suggest biodata inoculations, a common precaution for those few members of the lesser species who are permitted to visit the Homeworld], They wouldn't answer any of her questions, and truth be told Yvette thought they forgot about her for a while. They just shoved her in a pretty well-apportioned cell until dinnertime. Eventually, more soldiers escorted her to what looked like a banqueting hall, where Laura was seated with the old guy she'd tortured earlier. There were other people around as well, including one irritated-looking little rat-like man with a golden circlet around his head [the head of House Mirraflex]. Laura and the older guy (who Yvette later learned was called the War King) were sitting at opposite ends of the table. Laura patted the seat next to her, and the soldiers escorted Yvette there.

'You must be hungry, Ms. Carlton,' said the War King. 'What can we get for you?'

An attendant sidled over expectantly. 'What do you have?' Yvette asked.

The attendant looked over at the War King, and Laura interrupted, telling the attendant: 'I'm downloading some files into your storage. I'll flag the ones she'll enjoy most.'

'And what about yourself, Compassion?' the War King asked. I know we don't often cater to your tastes, but I'm sure our artificers could whip something up. Schwartzchildren a la Stattenheim, perhaps, or a Charged Vaccuum Souflee?'

Laura just shrugged, like she couldn't be bothered playing this game. The attendant scuttled off, and Laura turned to the War King.

'Shall we get back to business?' she said.

'Certainly. I take it you've had a chance to make your own assessment of …' the War King looked over his shoulder, as if he was worried that the universe would object to the next word he was about to say, although Yvette thought he might have been doing it as a joke, '…the enemy?'

'I've got my *own* ideas about who the enemy is, thanks,' said Laura. 'But yes, I have. You're in a mess, aren't you?'

'You could say that,' the King conceded. 'You could also say that the enemy's underlings slaughtered Percival, showing him no mercy whatsoever. Or that they have as much regard for your kind as they do for ours. I might even go so far as to say that you and I have a common adversary.'

'You're sure it was them?'

'Who else *could* it have been?'

Laura let a curtain of ice fall down over her gaze. 'I don't trust you.'

'I know that, my dear. I'm not the most trustworthy of individuals. But you can trust *it*, can't you? You can trust it not to stop until everyone in this room is dead, or worse than dead. With the possible exception of Ms. Carlton, of course.'

Laura thought about it for a few moments. While she was thinking the attendant returned with a plate of BLTs for Yvette, and a bowl containing what looked like a collection of tiny black spheres, circling around a common centre point.

'All right,' Laura finally announced. 'Then I'll join this War of yours. I'll open up a second front, if you like. But I'm not working with you. And I'm not working with any of your people.'

'Fair enough,' the War King replied.

'And I want recompense.'

'Recompense?'

Laura let the thought sink in before she said: 'Pilots.'

The room seemed a little incredulous, like she'd had them over a barrel only to stuff a few $100 bills into their back pockets.

'Certainly,' said the rat-faced man. 'We have a cohort of specially-primed timeship pilots ready to take control of your systems, if that's what you're after.'

The War King turned and looked daggers at Rat-Face. He must have said something really stupid.

'No,' said Laura, sounding like she was humouring him. 'I'm not looking for trained pilots. I want a breeding pair, safe from any of your programming. Fresh copies.'

'What?' The man's eyes bugged out. 'You honestly think we'd give you two of our *children?*'

Laura would later explain to Yvette that the Great Houses were insanely cautious when it came to their time-technology, especially the kind that was linked to them biologically. They'd have no qualms about breeding soldiers of just about any kind, to any specifications, and setting them loose wherever their allies asked them to ("bred for slaughter" was the phrase she used), but pureblood pilots were another matter.

‘Well, a breeding pair of pilots, or one of those big clunky breeding machines. Actually come to think of it I’ll take both. Old-style, new-style, I’m not picky But I want pilots.’

The Rat-Faced man pursed his lips. After pausing a few seconds, he said: ‘What do we have for assurance –’

Laura interrupted him. ‘What do you have for assurance? I can answer that one quite easily As a matter of fact, I think you can answer it *yourself* quite easily. You know where to look.’ She reached over, flicking a finger practically in his face, and produced a melodic *ping* from the circlet he was wearing. ‘As to what you’ll find there… one thing. Just one.’

The man shrank back, like he’d really been spooked. The War King cleared his throat, dramatically. ‘I’m sure we can come to some arrangement over dinner,’ he said. ‘Shall we all be civilised again?’

Laura looked back at the table. ‘I’m not hungry-’

Yvette, expressing some solidarity, put down the BLT she was eating and said: ’Neither am I.’

Laura reached into the bowl in front of her, pinching the centrepoint between her forefinger and thumb. ‘And I don’t think much of your hospitality in any case.’

She squeezed her fingers, and the black spheres swarmed out of the bowl and began attacking the other guests, like crazed black bees let loose on the banquet. Yvette jumped inside Laura, and the two of them were off.

[A historical footnote: there’s no record of this meeting in Great House records, but shortly after Compassion’s *known* visit to the Homeworld the War King ordered a security revamp of the Houses’ generative facilities. During this revamp, three items went missing: an older-generation breeding engine, a male infant pilot, and a female infant pilot.]

IV. Notes on the Rivera Manuscript

Probably the most famous War prediction of the Pre-War Era, mainly because it's easily the most lurid, is to be found in the Rivera Manuscript currently archived in the Eleven-Day Empire. The *readable* quarter of this long and complicated document is a first-person account of an incident in the life of one of the Homeworld's renegades, who's imprisoned by an unknown power and dosed with large amounts of praxis, a substance ostensibly capable of generating prescient visions. The account suggests that the renegade's physical captors were mere proxies, and this is consistent with the common view that he'd fallen into the hands of the enemy, already studying the Homeworld's weaknesses long before the War's outbreak. However, it's frequently been pointed out that the attack on the Homeworld described in the account is in no way a perfect match for the *real* first attack on the Homeworld, and only the Academicians for Game Logic ever suggested that the ruling Houses' interpretation of the text might be over-literal.

The manuscript is, in fact, the transcription of the renegade's praxis experiences and may even have been commissioned by his torturers. These people remain unknown: the manuscript alludes to humanoids, a non-carbon presence and something the prisoner names as *the first, the many and the indivisible* (this may be a bad translation).

The prisoner's account is structurally similar to that of the Saragossa manuscript, another document believed to have been praxis-inspired, but is prefaced by a brief but action-packed description of the renegade's imprisonment. Later, he's dosed with praxis and becomes caught in a regression of alternate time-states. There are a number of discrete sequences, including one describing a specific (but so far unidentified) House on the Homeworld and another apparently set *inside* the Homeworld's sun. The description suggests that the regressive sequence is actually a form of physical combat between the prisoner and his interrogator, who had also entered the praxis fugue and was attempting to guide the nature of the subject's experiences.

This interrogator is barely mentioned in the manuscript, and may arguably have been the author of the original. If true then this suggests that the account isn't actually a first-person confession but a report into the interrogation written for the author's superiors. The closest thing to a physical description is in the longest and most significant section of the praxis fugue. Here the prisoner finds himself standing at a familiar site on the Homeworld. In the vicinity is someone referred to as "One" (a title known to be taken by the head of the Celestis's Investigators, though the Celestis aren't mentioned anywhere else in the text and this may be a coincidence). At this point in the typed manuscript, a number of words have been struck through or inked over, suggesting a difficulty with the translation. Other asides in the manuscript seem to be interpolations about – or directed at – "One". The most coherent says, simply: *'why does it hate us?'*

The longest section is, of course, the prisoner's fantasy projection of the War. As has already been mentioned, this begins with the prisoner finding himself on the Homeworld, specifically in the foothills of the mountains at the edge of House society which overlook a prominent chapter-house. The prisoner descends and is met by a party of guards, who arrest him, claiming that the House is under telepathic attack. The prisoner blusters and argues, determined to investigate. Although galling, the delay saves his life – and those of the guards – as soon after this the House is destroyed when a 'black fireball' materialises out of the sky and crashes directly onto it.

The description of the fireball takes over thirty pages of telemetric data. This is, of course, untranslatable and the nature of the weapon (for it was undoubtedly directed, as subsequent events demonstrate) remains a mystery. In the manuscript, the prisoner speculates that it could have been 'a supercharged chunk of the causal nexus itself' but there remains no evidence for this.

The destruction of the chapterhouse is a shock for all involved. The prisoner barely has time to register it before there are more materialisations, further 'fireballs' plunging from the sky onto other nearby Houses. This is now unquestionably a concerted attack. The prisoner and a few of the more quick-witted guards descend immediately

to the smoking remains of the nearby House to search for survivors and perhaps discover what's going on. On the way, the prisoner strikes up a friendship with a female servitor who describes how the lords of the Household were spontaneously overwhelmed by seizures and madness.

The prisoner suggests that the first wave of the attack was directed at the Homeworld's noosphere, to which many of its inhabitants would have been directly linked. He speculates that with the Houses already under fire, the next wave of attacks will be aimed at grounded timeships. (Later there's a suggestion that a number of stolen timeships have been returned to the Homeworld, detonating ecstatically on materialisation.)

The House itself has been reduced to a smoking crater, but some of the outbuildings are still intact and the prisoner's party find survivors in the undamaged loomshed where the bloodline keeps its breeding-engine. Outside, many of the survivors are insane and uncontrollable, attacking anyone they encounter. The prisoner speculates that the attack on the noosphere was designed to corrupt rather than destroy, turning its victims into another weapon of the enemy. Soon, however, the enemy begins to land its troops and the prisoner and his party are besieged in the loomshed. The guards blast furiously but ineffectively at the ground troops from the shed's windows while anyone who dares to venture outside is cut down on sight. Meanwhile, communication with other pockets of resistance across the Homeworld is gradually lost. The prisoner, who now commands the survivors' respect and admiration, suspects the final, cataclysmic attack will be directed at the engineered sun which powers the whole of House society. In fact, he can't understand why the enemy's waiting. The breeding-engines, which usually only whisper to one another in the dead hours of the night, now scream continuously. Days and nights pass and the enemy remains relentless.

It's worth repeating the prisoner's description of the enemy's troops. They're first seen materialising out of gouges' in the sky, column after column disgorged in landing patterns, most of which fall within two miles of the House. An advance guard is captured by the prisoner's party but its members spontaneously combust before they can be questioned. The manuscript describes them as: 'Hominid/cybernetic fused into bulky metal armour. The metal is silvery and the humanoid shape is broken by

the spiny crests running down the back. Possibly exoskeletons? Power-suits? Their heads are flattened. They may have been descended from humanity, in which case their brains have been relocated somewhere less vulnerable. Their bodies are *[word smudged out]* and mutable. The design is elegantly decorated. I don't think I've faced such a beautiful enemy, or such a dangerous one.'

Alert readers of the text will no doubt recognise the striking resemblance these soldiers bear to the Ashla shock troops of the Blood Coteries of Siloportem. Before this prompts any speculation it should be remembered that the Coteries never existed coterminously with the Homeworld; that they forbade any kind of time travel, even by official and military agencies; and that their history is too well-documented for an incident like this to be blindly attributed to them.

Despite the prisoner's best efforts, the enemy's force is finally able to break his followers' resistance and invade the loomshed. The prisoner, expecting to be captured or killed, seems almost disappointed that they ignore him. Instead selected troops make directly for the breeding-engine where they plunge into the machinery, spontaneously detonating and leaving the looms intact but mutated. The symptoms of the sickness manifest quickly and it's suggested that the same fate has already befallen the engines of other Houses. The prisoner seems about to speculate on this new attack when, finally, the enemy neutralises the Homeworld's power source; the entire homeworld vanishes into cataclysm; and a new phase of the praxis fugue begins.

Little of this is consistent with the events surrounding the outbreak of the War, which has led many scholars to dismiss the entire manuscript. The enemy has, for example, never been known to use Ashla proxies (if Ashla they were). More importantly, the prisoner himself seems to deny that this was a true prediction. The section of the manuscript which follows this sequence suggests a conversation between tire prisoner and "One", or between the prisoner and the interrogator, or possibly both:

'Is that what you're planning / It might be / It still could be / Remember / Inside the skin of the sun / It's an option / It wouldn't work / What if someone tried it / What if you were called to account / It's an option /

Always an option / You keep the sun / In a bottle / You want to know what happens if you lose control / Don't you?'

The Timeline

A complete history of the Great Houses since the anchoring of the thread would be inordinately long and, given the static nature of the Houses for most of that time, inordinately dull. *This* timeline begins with what's often called the Pre-War Era, the point at which the first cracks began to appear in House society. The dating system here is relative to the start of the War, with the year leading up to the first offensive being designated "-1" and the year after it "+1".

***-1,152*:** The earliest flaws are noticed in the Houses' reproductive systems. Among those of the "affected generation" are the future head of the Imperator Presidency and the founder of House Paradox. The flaws are initially dismissed as 'trivial'.

***-880*:** Already advanced in the ranks of the ruling Houses, the future Imperator founds the Order of the Weal as an instrument of state power.

***-870*:** Era of the Imperator. The Order of the Weal's first great coup is to expose his unstable, megalomaniac tendencies. The commissioning of the babels indicates that the Houses are entering worrying new territory.

***-866*:** The fall and (rushed) execution of the Imperator. Even so, much of the Spiral Politic has become aware of the Houses' presence for the first time. The Homeworld begins to enter its paranoid phase.

***c. -700*:** Rise of the intervention groups, demanding greater involvement with the lesser species in the wake of the Imperator's crusade. Within three-hundred years, interventionism has reached the stage where some of its proponents can comfortably contemplate genocide. Anxiety grows among the Houses.

***-403*:** A notable member of one of the more erratic Houses publicly questions the Protocols, and founds House Paradox under the title of "Grandfather". The Grandfather's appearance before the audience of the ruling Houses demonstrates that the Houses have no way of knowing how to respond to these new threats to the status quo.

***-396*:** House Paradox creates the Eleven-Day Empire as a safe-haven outside the main mass of the Spiral Politic. Though the Empire remains largely unoccupied, it's used as a bolt-hole and a reliquary by the Grandfather's followers for years to come.

***-392*:** A somewhat deluded clique of academicians declares its intention to found a "rival Homeworld" in the outside universe, and sets up its powerbase on Dronid. The ruling Houses, not wanting to risk another Imperator debacle, raze much of the world's surface. In the aftermath of the crisis the Houses crack down on all threats to the established hierarchy, and imprison the Grandfather of House Paradox, supposedly in perpetuity.

***-380*:** The Order of the Weal encounters (future) agents of Faction Paradox on Zo la Domini, gaining its first real glimpse of the War to come. The Order begins to disintegrate after this point.

***c. -155*:** The idea of *hybridisation* is starting to emerge on the Homeworld, to the disdain of the traditional elite. Timeships are beginning to develop new systems and facilities in a fashion which almost suggests natural evolution.

***-151*:** The Grandfather of House Paradox escapes (or is released) from captivity. The House is re-defined as Faction Paradox, a sign of a more political House society. The Grandfather retires from history altogether soon afterwards.

***-138*:** By now, further – theoretically impossible – encounters with the Homeworld's future have led to open speculation about the possibility of warfare. However, none of the lesser species seem likely to become a viable threat and for the most part the ruling Houses refuse to act. Even so the idea of hominid-sentient timeships is discussed, timeships with possible military applications.

***-81*:** Return of the War King, formerly a House renegade and now claiming to possess knowledge of the future enemy. A warning is given to the nominal head of House society, but ignored.

***-76*:** The War King appears before a Closed Session of the ruling Houses, despite his criminal status, and reveals what he knows. Many among the Houses are convinced by his testimony. The ruling elite remains obstructionist, however, still holding the War to be an impossibility. Some of the intervention groups may play a part in this.

***c. -50*:** Faction Paradox is expanding its influence away from the Homeworld, and now recruiting from the lesser species. It has connections on Dronid, among other places, where it's become part cult and part criminal organisation. Its tactics are soon adopted by the Faction's other "cabals".

***-36*:** The War King returns to the Homeworld once again, only to be arrested by the obstructionists. The head of House society makes the Faraway Declaration in order to prove the non-existence of the enemy … only to become the enemy's first victim. The Homeworld is finally forced to prepare for the War, although the hardline intervention groups are appalled by the thought that they might actually be *threatened*.

***-32*:** The first of the Academicians for Game Logic is appointed, suggesting that the Homeworld is becoming more adaptable under the War King's supervision.

***c. -20*:** It's around this time that the extremist intervention groups remove themselves from House society – and from history – in order to escape the War altogether, although it's obviously impossible to establish a definite date for this. They become the Celestis, and their enclave of Mictlan is founded.

***-19*:** The 90-form timeships are sanctioned, the first time the ruling Houses have allowed themselves to consider military-specific time-ships.

***-12*:** With the Houses no longer paying them close attention, Faction Paradox's members on Dronid become complacent, even corrupt (if that's at all possible). Their recklessness in supplying House technology to the lesser species is typical of the Faction as a whole. A rival criminal group moves in on Dronid, but as yet makes little impression on the rest of the Spiral Politic: in fact it eventually becomes clear that this organisation is a

front for the enemy, putting out "feelers" on the edges of the other powers' territory.

***-10*:** The Houses finally move against Faction Paradox, clearing the stage for the imminent War. The Faction's chosen home-world is eradicated, forcing its elders to decamp *en masse* to the Eleven-Day Empire, which becomes a genuine community for the first time. Meanwhile, the ruling Houses begin to notice the new power emerging on Dronid and plant their own agents on the world. What follows is a ten-year microcosm of the War itself, as operatives of the two major War-time sides engage in plots and counter-plots to break each other's influence… and possibly to test each others' defences.

***-8*:** The Faction – bloodied but unbowed – is forced to adjust its tactics, and rather than forming a new powerbase in the outside universe chooses a more subtle approach, quietly infiltrating other cultures in the hope that the Houses aren't familiar enough with the lesser species to notice. The result of this policy is the creation of the Remote, the first generation of humans augmented by House technology.

***-6*:** The War King becomes the official head of House society.

***c. -5*:** The history of the posthuman era is beginning to intersect the history of the Houses, and most of the posthuman societies become aware that the War's fast approaching. Many choose sides, while others see the conflict as an opportunity to scavenge time-technology from both the major players. It's around this time that Mrs. Foyle founds her infamous history-spanning brothel, the House of the Rising Sun.

-2: The first human/timeship hybrid, Compassion, begins to develop. The War King attempts to "recruit" her for use in a new timeship breeding programme, initially without success. On Dronid, the exact nature of the enemy is becoming clear as forces from both sides move in to cover the area.

***-1*:** While the Homeworld's forces track down Compassion and Faction Paradox gets its House in order, events on Dronid reach their inevitable conclusion. The War proper begins [see appendix I]. Dronid is devastated, again. Soon afterwards the Homeworld itself is attacked: though the attack

is repelled, certain weapons technologies are erased from its noosphere. The casts, longtime drones of the Houses, are severed from the world and few survive.

***+1*:** The War quickly expands across the Spiral Politic. The early Thousand-Year Battles become intractable. Watching events from outside the Spiral Politic, many of the Celestis decide to "nudge" the War along, one way or another. Those in Mictlan who now oppose the Houses pass on the conceptual entities to the enemy. Work begins on the breeding of the 103-form timeships, and although Compassion is thought to have been involved in this process her relationship with the Houses remains vague.

***+2*:** Taking advantage of the disruption, the Faction puts its Remote shock-troops into action on worlds such as Simia-KK98. The Remote fail miserably, the Houses easily deducing who's behind the attacks. The Faction elects to give the Remote a greater degree of autonomy, hence its projects among the North American warrior tribes, but in many circles the organisation's now considered something of an irrelevance.

***+4*:** Early bio-diversity experiments by House technologists. Members of the lesser species can now be primed as regen-inf troops, and among the new wave of military thinkers are strategists like Entarodora. The Houses become aware of that a time-active assassination society, the Remonstration Bureau, is operating from the posthuman era: it's tolerated as long as it doesn't directly threaten House interests.

***+5*:** The Venue Accords are created, the one (failed) attempt at a peace process in War history. Faction Paradox, still reeling from the loss of its Homeworld, is the one party not invited. With peace considered an impossibility, the Houses prepare their Second Wave of soldiery.

***+6*:** Devonire, first of the Academicians for Game Logic, fails in his last-ditch attempt to reconcile the Houses with the Faction. After his downfall the genocidal campaigns of the Second Wave begin, sterilising many of the Faction's project-worlds and severing its communications to the Remote. Only the Eleven-Day Empire remains secure.

+8: Discontent is on the rise in Faction Paradox as a result of the Second Wave atrocities. It's in this period that the breakaway (and short-lived)

Thirteen-Day Republic is founded by Cousin Anastasia.

***+10*:** Compassion engages in a non-permanent alliance with the War King to open up a "second front" against the enemy. The meaning of this is still unclear.

***+11*:** The Third Wave is created in time for the Lethean Campaign, one of the few protracted physical engagements of the War. The Campaign sees the last use of the babels.

***+14*:** Faction Paradox suffers the last of many indignities when the Eleven-Day Empire is breached by the Star Chamber of Britain, using the analytical engine as its weapon. Much of the Eleven-Day Empire has to be reconstructed, although this does give the Faction a much-needed chance to re-evaluate its organisation.

***+17*:** The Fourth Wave is created, re-introducing bio diversity to the Houses. Robert Scarratt soon becomes one of the most notable Fourth Wave agents.

***+25*:** The Fifth Wave is created, a far more stable proposition than any of the earlier House Military forces. Much of the troops' indoctrination takes place at the newly-founded academy under Kobe, the Gauntlet.

***+29*:** The Army of One project at the Gauntlet produces an entire strikeforce from the lone timeline of the agent Christopher Rodonanté Cwej.

***+31*:** The Great Houses finally decide to intervene in the West Coast Empire of Michael Brookhaven, a Hollywood-based Remote agent and inheritor of Faction Paradox's North American legacy.

***+32*:** The Fourth Wave is now engaged in a much more rational crusade against the Remote, realising that corruption of the Remote's culture is far more effective than mass carnage. Those forces rendered harmless by this strategy become known as the Broken Remote.

***+38*:** The Seventh Wave is created, founded on the principles of subversion and cultural impregnation developed by the Houses in previous years. Scarratt's tactics have already paved the way for a weakening of the mass psyches of certain lesser species.

***c. +40*:** By now all contact between Faction Paradox and the Remote has effectively been severed. The Faction has re-built itself as a major power, but a far more cautious one, largely concerned with biological and weapons research rather than grand gestures of defiance. All across the Spiral Politic, the War has entered its entrenchment phase.

***+44*:** The Eighth Wave is created.

***+50*:** The present. In the Eleven-Day Empire, the biodata weapons of Godfather Morlock have been shown to be effective; on the Homeworld, House Tracolix has taken an unexpected interest in the breeding of the new soldiery; on the posthuman worlds, various rumours are beginning to spread regarding the relationship between the Houses and humanity; and for the House Military, no quick end to the War seems to be in sight.

Notes

[←1]

“Reportedly” being the operative word, as Chad Vandemeer later claimed that the sphinxes were actors in elaborate costume. But other accounts make it dear that they were definitely loa of some description, so it’s possible that Brookhaven put two extras through the loa-creation process in order for them to masquerade as his own personal monsters. Perhaps even ghosts need gofers and hangers-on.

[←2]

Pedants have called this into question, pointing out that in order to fit Shelley's meter the word "Dvora" has to be pronounced "dev-or-ay". But as the translation of House names into English is imprecise at the best of times this doesn't seem unreasonable.

[←3]

There are actually six ruling Houses on the Homeworld, but one would hardly expect House Mirraflex to do anything as vulgar as forming alliances with the lesser species.

[←4]

Though his father took the name of “the Dragon”, in the local dialect “dragon” and “devil” are interchangeable.

[←5]

Similarly, in Hollywood gossip circles there's a much-repeated story that the shadow of a hanged backstage-worker can be seen in one shot of The Wizard of Oz, his suicide accidentally recorded by the cameras on the other side of the set curtain. But there's never been a shred of proof offered to support this idea, and the story only seems to date back as far as the 1970s.

[←6]

‘Ten million years’ is also the length of Homeworld time which elapsed between the foundation of history and the start of the War, at least according to the ruling Houses. This may be significant, or may just demonstrate a love of large base-10 numbers common to both the Houses and humanity.

[←7]

Probably the best equivalent term in human culture. The word means "follower" but literally translates as "ant-men", a good description of the Order's black-and-gold-clad soldiery.

[←8]

It's important to bear in mind the nature of much posthuman culture at this stage. Conventional interstellar travel was only accepted because of the artistry involved in the creation of the ships, even though there were far more efficient ways of getting from place to place. Similarly there were far better ways of making a fortune than becoming a pirate, but this was an age of deliberate extravagance. Some of them even used swords.

[←9]

Interestingly, Father Abdullah was – during his former life as Richard Francis Burton – an associate of the author Bram Stoker. It should be pointed out that (a) Stoker's Dracula bears very little similarity to an actual Mal'akh, and (b) the real Vlad the Impaler was certainly not one of the undead, but it's nonetheless quite possible that Burton's knowledge of African and eastern vampiric lore contributed something to the mythology of the novel.

[←10]

Witness, also, the rise of Faction Paradox after its Grandfather's Act of Severance.

[←11]

In more recent times the idea of a so-called Christian crusade decimating entire Muslim areas just to wipe out a small number of inhuman killers would seem bizarre, but this was a less civilised century.

[←12]

The word is Hebrew in origin, and suggests “false accusers” or just “adversaries”. Even in the original Old Testament texts it doesn’t refer to anybody human. Surviving texts on the s’tanim are annoyingly vague, most of them probably destroyed by religious purges over the centuries.

[←13]

Usually by people from Earth, however.

[←14]

In the Pre-War era the Houses' sigil depicted the serpent in a figure-eight position, and even though the War has simplified the design the serpent remains, a noticeable throwback to the Houses' biological past as it's doubtful that one in a hundred academicians has even seen a genuine snake. In fact, the War Era sigil bears an even more striking resemblance to the ouroboros/garter.

[←15]

Interestingly enough small, budded sub-universes have been observed in certain artificially-aged sections of the Spiral Politic, suggesting that at some point the continuum might well "spawn". But this is likely to happen so far in the future that to all intents and purposes it makes no difference to any of the War Era powers.

[←16]

A Violent Unknown Event (VUE) is a form of high-order chaotic effect beyond even the normal bounds of catastrophe theory, which has a habit of remaining catastrophic long after the event itself, affecting not only those present but those who might later investigate its parameters. In truth the term should warrant its own entry in this current volume, but – by its very nature – information on VUEs has a tendency to crash, corrupt, vanish or self-falsify. From the Houses' point of view the VUEs are mostly regarded as too unpredictable to exploit, and the fact that the enemy is supposedly capable of engineering them says a great deal about the difference between the two sides.

About the Editor

LAWRENCE MILES was born in 1972. His earliest memory is of being terrified by a giraffe at London Zoo (he'd never really seen anything that *big* before), and it's entirely possible that his insistence on writing vast, oversized epics is a kind of subconscious revenge against an animal which must have died years ago anyway. This might sound fatuous, but he genuinely means it. So far he's written seven novels and at least one good short story, and he's currently busy with the *Faction Paradox* comic book.

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*If you would like to see what the original Faction Paradox site looked like, here is an archived version on the Wayback Machine, on Archive.org; **the site no longer exists in real time, and appears to have been taken down sometime after August 16th 2006:**

https://web.archive.org/web/20060816063822/http://www.factionparadox.co.uk/

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www.madnorwegian.com

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Extras

We the transcribers have changed a few things about the Book. We fixed several typos; we changed the formatting when it didn't transfer nicely into ebook format; we updated a few words of the Shift's commentary in Beshielach; and we have added these extras.

Firstly, on a hidden page of the Faction Paradox website, editor Lawrence Miles provided a "hidden pathway" through the Book's entries, albeit with, "almost certainly, at least one mistake". These Design Specs for Advanced Users are reproduced below, as well as in a secondary section of this ebook's Table of Contents.

Secondly, in the opening notes, Miles apologised to Lance Parkin, David A. McIntee, and Eddie Robson for not being able to work in their material. While McIntee was interested but never actually wrote any full entries, Parkin and Robson both later published their contributions elsewhere. Simon Bucher-Jones also wrote two additional entries for a never-made CD-ROM edition of the Book. We've formatted these and included them here as apocrypha.

We hope these extras will only serve to enhance the reading experience for new and interested *Faction Paradox* fans. Enjoy!

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Design Specs for Advanced Users

Obviously *The Book of the War* isn't meant to be read in a linear order: it's part of the book's design that no two people are likely to start in exactly the same place, and that every reader is therefore going to have his or her own ideas about which bits are the important bits. But…

As anyone who's seen the *Book* will know, entries are linked by titles in bold face, so that it's possible to "navigate" from one part of the story to another just by following up a particular name or phrase. And the truth is that there's a secret pathway running through the whole volume, a way of reading the complete story by moving from link to link without ever arriving at the same entry twice. (With one exception. There's a single entry which isn't connected to anything else, but never mind that now.) If you know the pathway then it's possible to read the book "normally", i.e. from start to finish.

Those of you who don't know *The Book of the War* should, of course, ignore all of this: if ever you get round to reading it, there's no reason to make things less interesting by sticking to the "original" running order. But if you're already familiar with the book, then here's what it'd look like if it were taken apart and laid out in a straight line...

The Core Entries

Spiral Politic; Great Houses; House Military; Celestis; Faction Paradox; Remote; Lesser Species; Yssgaroth…

The History of Faction Paradox

…Anchoring of the Thread; Armour; Audience of the Ruling Houses; Caldera; Eleven-Day Empire; Fashion Paradox; Gregorian Compact; History; Imperator Presidency; Intervention; Linearity; Loa; London (Eighteenth Century); Morlock; (House) Paradox; Recruitment; Ritual; Severance;

Sombras que Corta; Stacks; Stendec; Tower Hill; Unkindnesses; Westminster...

The History of Earth

...Analytical Engine; Book of Enoch; Burton; Byron; (Ada) Byron; Canon per Tonos; Clockwork Ouroboros;Eleven-Day Empire: The 1834 Attack; Ghost Clusters; Grand Families; Grindlay's Warehouse; Grotesques; Karachi; Liber Sanguisugarum; Mal'akh; Maltese Incident; Mountains of the Moon; Musical Offering; Napoleonic Era; "Princess of Parallelograms"; Shelley Cabal; Society of St. George; Speke; Star Chamber; Walking Dead; Xianthellipse; Scarratt...

The A - Z of the War

...Scarratt's Group; Entaradora; "Monsters" Coda; Xenoprediction; "You" Diversions; "Probability" Doctrine; Confusion; Utterlost; Zero Time; Gravity Spiders; Time-Thickening; Apportation; Women (Dressing Up as); Nechronomancers; HEM; Ordifica; Intercreationals; Leviathans; Quintessence; Redemption Cult; Forced Regen Missions; D-Mat; Burlesque Devices; "Killerbots" (Autonomic); Vaccinations (Temporal)...

Houses and Orders

...Jungle Children; Hauserkinder; "Justine's Story"; Arpexia; Babels; Casts; Catherion; Ixion; Leathean Campaign; Order of the Weal; Thessalia; War Predictions: Chatelaine Thessalia; Zo la Domini...

The History of the Homeworld

...Closed Session; Dronid; Dvora; Enemy; Faraway Declaration; First Message from the Enemy; Head of the Presidency; Homeworld; Lineacrux; Nine Homeworlds; Noosphere; Presidency; Protocols of the Great Houses; Regen-Inf; Ruling Houses; Sex; Space (Five Famous Battles); Timeships; Tobin; Umbaste; War King; Yeh; Appendix III; Compassion...

The History of Posthumanity

...Earth; Posthumanity; Praxis; Siloportem; Time-Travel: Posthuman; War Predictions: The Rivera Manuscript; Appendix IV...

The Academician's Story

...Academicians for Game Logic; Devonire; Grandfather Paradox (Representations); Grandfather's Arm; Kaiwar; Paradox Anxiety; Thousand-Year Battles; Waves; Appendix I...

The Non-History of the Celestis

...Anarchitects; Chaotic Limiter; Conceptual Entities; Fluxes; Gargoyles; Meme; Mictlan; Order of the Dragon; Ottoman Purges; Sacrifice; Shifts...

The Shift's Story

...Beshielach; Dating War Era Events; Greater Autrobulan Franchise; Lords Celestial; Memeovore; Planetesimals; Reboots; Worldofme...

The City of the Saved

...City of the Saved; Timebeast Assault; Verrifant; Mirraflex; Mantissa; Het Linc; Secret Architects; Uptime Gate; Lefcourt; Krymtorpor; Ghetto of the Damned; Foaming Sky; Order of the Iron Soul; Pinocchio; Rump Parliament; Timon; (House) Halfling; Piltdown Mob; Sons of Tepes...

The Impaler's Story

...Tirgoviste; Ulterior Worlds; Vlad III; Wallachia; Djinn; Edimmu; Gragov; Halved Birth; Investigators; Investigator 31; Mark of Indenture; Poenari Relic; Rasputin...

The Thirteen-Day Republic

...Anastasia; Cult of Celebrity Death; Dyavol; House of Lords; Malachite Room; Nadim; Octavia; Red Burial; Removal of Members; Thirteen-Day Republic; Valentine's Day; Winter Palace; Witch-Blood...

Labyrinths

...Biodata; Diaspora; Eremites; Faction Precursors; Foyle; House of the Rising Sun; Labyrinths; Remonstration Bureau; Voodoo Charter; Venue Accords; Weaponstores...

The Ghost Dance

...A'daltem Ano'nde; Belial; Catch-the-Bear's War Bonnet; Ghost Shirts; North American Warrior Tribes; Nun'aha'wu; Open Doors; Pai'ngya; Peyote Dream-Runners; Sand and Snow Ammunition; Tenskwatawa; Appendix II...

The History of the Remote

...Anchormen; Broken Remote; Fallahal; Jallama Reed Transmissions; New Young Gods; Remembrance Tanks; Shadow Masks; Simia KK98; Viewers and Listeners Protocols; Wovoka...

Faction Hollywood

...Brookhaven; Brookhaven's Follies; Cwej; Cwejen; Faction Hollywood; Fat; Gauntlet; GCI Processor; Hollow Spectaculars; Hollywood Bowl Shooting; House of the Seven Gables; Mount Usu Duel; "Mystery of Edwin Drood"; North Los Angeles Cabal; Order of the White Peacock; Production Hell; "Through the Eye of Eternity"; Vandemeer...

The End

..."Briefings"; Humanity; Nanotechnology; Nevitz; Time-Travel: Biodata Principle; Younger World Story...

Coda

...(House) Lolita; (House) Tracolix.

There is, almost certainly, at least one mistake in this listing.

Apocrypha

***FATHER* KATZMARY [*Eddie Robson*]** Father Katzmary was, in human terms, analogous to an anthropologist or sociologist, and although not always a popular figure within the Faction, his theories of cultural determinism were instrumental in Faction policy following the destruction of their homeworld by the Great Houses. It is hardly surprising that Katzmary came to the Faction, given that the restrictions imposed by the Great Houses forced him to work purely theoretically until he broke free of their order.

Katzmary is, of course, best known for the Minimediras Project: a controversial undertaking at the time, it remains so today. His opponents branded him a 'megalomaniac' when they saw the full extent of the Project, not that they believed that this was necessarily a bad thing in itself, but his obsession with control, it was believed, overrode all other concerns. The purpose of his 'research' was questioned many times, and it is hard to deny that, in the light of later events, Katzmary's integrity was rather less than solid.

However, his numerous supporters considered him to be a great *auteur*, a view that was borne out by the artistic movements that his work inspired in other civilisations, many years later. Ultimately, when his contribution to the Faction came into its own, criticisms of him began to seem churlish and he came to be well regarded by those within the organisation.

***THE* MINIMERIDAS PROJECT [*Eddie Robson*]** The Project was the brainchild of Father Katzmary, and was the fulfilment of his lifelong desire to field-test his theories on how individual cultural artefacts could influence the development of a society. Katzmary had spoken of this from the day he joined the ranks of Faction Paradox, and found a number of sympathetic ears. After six years in the organisation, he was permitted to submit a proposal to his peers.

Katzmary's plan was this. He would construct a series of identical cities, each of which would be home to a self-contained civilisation, on a chain of thirty-seven identical islands in Earth's Pacific Ocean. He would then conduct experiments with each civilisation by introducing different cultural artefacts to each one, or by reprogramming their history, or introducing different religions. The proposal was accepted, and although some doubts were voiced as to whether it was necessary to site it on Earth, Katzmary argued that it was immensely more convenient in terms of resources.

The first stage was to create the location for the experiments, and accordingly Katzmary travelled to the Earth of 1700 and surveyed the Pacific. He reported back that there was a landmass in the centre of the ocean, named Minimediras, which could easily be terraformed into the islands he needed for the Project. It was an area which humanity had never discovered, a beautiful place populated by strange and sophisticated creatures, the origin of whom nobody was certain: Katzmary described seeing 'people made of smoke and cities made of song'.

He returned the next day armed with a pair of bellows and a tuning fork, and laid the entire island to waste. Now, he was ready to begin.

The ring of thirty-seven island states, all named Minimediras, were beautifully crafted melanges of architectural schools, blending apparently incompatible styles with ease. When the final remaining city on Earth was eventually discovered by human archaeologists in the 38th century (the usual Faction sleight-of-hand kept them from ever finding Minimediras whilst the project was running), it was noted that parts resembled 1920s Manhattan, whilst others were reminiscent of 19th-century Tuscany or the Trinidad of the 2060s and 70s. Each covered around twenty square miles

and was populated by deeply ordinary humanoids, each with memories and histories programmed in.

The cities were then left to develop of their own accord for fifty years, just to let them settle in. It is a testament to Katzmary's skill as a social engineer that the cities appeared, to all intents and purposes, to have developed entirely naturally, despite being completely artificial. Katzmary noted the development of those whose histories and religions deviated from the others, then proceeded to the next stage.

Whilst nobody was banned from leaving each island, those that did were picked up, left in stasis for a week or two, then put back believing that they had been somewhere exciting, with artificial memories of the trip implanted. Often, they would return with a painting, or book, or record that they had bought whilst they'd been there. This, of course, would have been bestowed upon them by Katzmary, who would then observe what the population made of each new discovery.

(Later, he found that it was remarkably easy to simply plant an artefact in the middle of a civilisation with no explanation: people assumed that it had always been there and they had never noticed it. Indeed, many of the populace unwittingly assisted him in this deception by pretending that they had always been into it and were amazed that it had taken everybody else so long to catch on. Katzmary's resulting paper on 'Neglected Classic' theory is generally considered to be his finest work.)

Early projects concentrated on more obvious gambits, such as introducing Shakespeare or The Beatles to a civilisation. The impact of these was easily demonstrated, and formed the basis of Katzmary's first reports back to the homeworld. These were enthusiastically received, and his theories on how the spread of ideas through a culture could be predicted and, given that information, manipulated, would later form the basis of so much of the Faction's work during the War. For now, though, they merely gave Katzmary the green light to expand his operations.

Having no more space to develop, Katzmary expanded his base of operations in time. Many, many new cities were developed on the same thirty-seven islands, but in the past and future (this, of course, necessitated destroying the unfortunate smoke-people and their entire civilisation

again, at an earlier point in time). A ‘reset’ system was developed from the time rituals, which allowed each civilisation to be brought back to its original state once an experiment had run its course. Due to the nature of these new cities, it is difficult to tell exactly how many there were in total: most estimates fall between 250 and 400.

However, given these greatly expanded resources, Katzmary began to lose focus. Although the second phase of the Project got off to a great start, as the hugely positive impact of Lego on the development of a culture was realised, subsequent experiments were increasingly obscure and the results were frequently met with bafflement on the homeworld. After Katzmary’s six-hour report on his findings following an experiment in which two civilisations were each provided with half of Bob Dylan’s back catalogue – one got the albums from before he went electric and the other got the rest – there were serious murmurings of cutting the project off.

However, too much had already been invested and Katzmary still had a firm bedrock of support on the homeworld. Or at least, he did until it was discovered that Katzmary had been abusing several of the experiments for dubious ‘role-playing’ purposes. In one of the cities, in which a strong criminal element had developed, he was something akin to a Mafia Don; in another, he was a professional ice-hockey player. Bizarrely, in another culture, he had set himself up as the drummer in Jefferson Airplane.

It was also discovered that Katzmary had spent four months bio-engineering a 22-year-old female, whom he named Cynthia Glassman and regularly enjoyed sexual relations with. The Faction, initially unsure as to whether it should approve of such things or not, eventually decided that Katzmary’s fetishistic attitude towards lesser species was seriously compromising his integrity. The Project was wound up and Katzmary, reviled on the homeworld, elected to go into exile.

The Faction had always monitored Minimediras for new recruits, much to Katzmary’s annoyance: he claimed that the results would be skewed if elements were removed from the population. With the experiments over, the islands were stripped for new recruits and removed from the Earth, all except for one, which was left behind for humanity to find. Nobody knows what purpose, if any, this served, although it has been convincingly

suggested that the confusion it caused amongst humanity upon its discovery was reward in itself.

One of the islands ended up on the sixth of the Great Houses' clone-worlds, Acanibus. The fate of the other thirty-five islands is unknown, although Cynthia Glassman was settled on Ostenthal, a human colony world that fell under the influence of the Faction, where she gave birth to Katzmary's daughter, Tanya Glassman.

PROTECTIVE NEOTONY [*Simon Bucher-Jones*] The inhabitants of the lesser worlds that form the backdrop of the war resemble – at least on the surface – the scions of the Great Houses. There are a number of theories about this. One is that like species contend for like habitats, and thus contention over like habitats involves like species. This is true but unhelpful, and depends on limited definitions of both species and habitat.

One is that the primacy of the Great Houses, the anchoring of the thread of history in their own world, compelled the worlds that can later to resemble them. This is a half-truth.

Consider for a moment the Samuri crab of the Japanese sea – so called for the markings on its shell which resemble a Samuri warrior's face. In local tradition such crabs are held to resemble the dead boy-emperor Antoku (1185) who, with his Heike followers drowned themselves rather than bend the knee to the victorious Genji after the battle of Dan-no-ura. Crabs possessed of such markings are revered and returned unharmed when caught, to the sea.

Consider also the artistic evolution of Mickey Mouse. Originally, unsurprisingly perhaps, he looked like a mouse – albeit one with gloves, and ears whose position remained unchanged no matter how his head is orientated – but gradually over time he grew more and more to resemble a young child. The eyes grew larger, emphasising the pupil, the cheeks chubbier.

Finally every crab has a face, and Mickey looks like a human infant – albeit one with gloves and disturbing ears.

When facing a predatory history, it is a survival characteristic to resemble something that will interrupt the aggression of a potential victor. A helpless infant – squarling out evolutionary cues – a weaker version of themselves, something that reminds them of a famous moment in their past. On no account does it do to look threatening, alien, dangerous, or even off-putting.

The lesser races resemble the members of the Great Houses, because in the ebb and flow of time any who did not were pruned away. It may not have

been anything as deliberate as genocide – although House Mirraflex has undoubtably destroyed a number of worlds to limited, obvious, tactical advantage – a subtle sense of squeamishness that makes an ally of one people, while another is left to wither, is quite sufficient over a long period. It is sufficient that the Great Houses only mix with “people like us”.

This does however beg a question. If races and peoples have been moulded to resemble the inhabitants of the Homeworld by the tides of history, where are they ones moulded into the image of the enemy?

TANYA GLASSMAN [*Eddie Robson*] Tanya was the daughter of Father Katzmary and his artificially-grown lover, Cynthia Glassman, and has been sarcastically referred to by some commentators as 'the ultimate product of the Minimediras Project'. After the Project was wound up in disrepute, Cynthia was resettled on Ostenthal, a human colony over which the Faction had held an influence for a couple of hundred years. She gave birth to Tanya a few years later.

Tanya's father had been a man of considerable intelligence, and her mother had been engineered by her father to be extremely beautiful. Tanya, however, received her father's looks and her mother's intellect, neither of which could be described as anything other than completely average. Her life was almost entirely uneventful until the age of nineteen: she left education at the standard age of thirteen and went to work as a low-grade tech assistant in telecommunications research. The involvement of this planet in the War was near-minimal, and the Faction only came there once more during Tanya's lifetime. (They did, however, continue to keep Ostenthal cut off from the rest of human space, as they had for the duration of their influence.)

A few weeks after Tanya's nineteenth birthday, a marked change came over her. Despite a complete lack of genetic surgery facilities on this planet at this time, her appearance altered substantially over the course of around three months. Marcel Quantas' authorised biography of Tanya gives a full description which, although too pornographic to be reprinted here, has been generally agreed upon as accurate by all other sources. (This is characteristic of Quantas' book: many attempts have been made to discredit it on the grounds that, not only was it authorised by Tanya herself, but also you don't need a degree in psychoanalysis to realise that Quantas was fuelled by a combination of hero-worship and sexual obsession when writing it.

However, rigorous background research has demonstrated that this is the tone, rather than the content, that suffers from Quantas' lack of impartiality.) Most notably, Tanya's height increased by six inches, to 5'11".

Evidence of her increased intellect also began to emerge. She had previously been unable to grasp much beyond the basic principles of her

employers' research, but by the age of twenty-one she had been promoted three times and held a fairly advanced position within the organisation. The change in Tanya appeared to threaten many of her colleagues, and this factor was central in her prosecution of Dr Rikjard Bullst on sexual harassment charges. Rather than hire a lawyer, she chose to put the case herself – another demonstration of her newly found intelligence and confidence – and won, despite a clear lack of evidence. Tanya successfully argued that Dr Bullst was compulsively self-destructive and should no longer be permitted to make his own decisions. (He committed suicide in prison eight years later.) Either uncomfortable with her former workplace, or bored of the lack of challenges, Tanya left the field of comms research after winning the case.

Although regarded cautiously by the populace at large as stories of her transformation spread, Tanya carved out a successful career as a consultant on matters of strategic management. This lasted over one hundred years and was only brought to an end by the death of everybody on the planet, as a consequence of the experiments carried out by Mother Festen (see separate entry). No children had been born on Ostenthal since Tanya was a child, and the population gradually died off. Tanya, who had barely aged since her mid-twenties, was the only inhabitant left alive: a product of her mixed heritage.

Although saddened by the death of everybody she had ever known, Tanya saw the collapse of her business as an opportunity to concentrate on her painting. She calculated that the city would be able to run itself for a few decades yet, as long as nothing broke down, and she spent a lengthy period indulging her artistic impulses. (The works that she produced in this time eventually made their way to human space, where they drew favourable comparisons with the work of Mark Rothko.) This sedentary, almost bohemian existence was interrupted only when she realised Mother Festen's presence on Ostenthal. Upon discovering that Festen had been responsible for the slow catastrophe, Tanya discovered hitherto unsuspected reaches of righteousness and brutality by killing her where she stood. (This event inspired her acclaimed *Festen's Crimes* series of paintings.)

Tanya was now aware of the ways in which the Faction had influenced her planet and her life: Festen had known all about her and had been pathetically willing to fill her in. She knew that she was not a native of Ostenthal, that the Faction had fitted the genetic 'flip' that had provided her with her father's mind and her mother's attractiveness, and that there was almost certainly some purpose to all this. Realising that she could do nothing with this information, however, she continued to paint.

Eight years later, a shuttlecraft landed just outside the building where Tanya lived. On investigating, she found no pilot and a file of documents. (This was, of course, the work of the Faction, and is a strong contender for the least subtle thing that it has ever done, but on a planet with only one inhabitant, who needs to be subtle?) The top sheet in the file strongly advised her to leave the planet: on an impulse, she did so. As she piloted the craft away from her home of the least 137 years, the Faction moved in and laid the planet to waste. This strongly suggested to her that she follow whatever other advice the file contained. It told her to set a course for the planet Acanibus, and go beneath the sea, where she would find a lost city protected by a kind of energy bubble.

Hokey as this sounded, it was absolutely true. Her arrival had even been predicted by a series of completely unfounded rumours, and she came before them looking tall, authoritative and breathtakingly attractive: in other words, suitably Godlike. Thereafter, the excitable, suggestible population was hers to command. As instructed, she led the populace to take over the planet to which they had been transported: after their success, her fate is unknown.

***MISTER* SALDAAMIR [*Lance Parkin*]** It waits for no man, it heals all wounds, it flies when you are having fun, it has a winged chariot, it can be high, and you can have a gay old one.

What Time is not very good at is looking after itself. It's forever falling out of joint, people are always complaining about having a hard time, a tough time, a difficult time.

The original idea was very, very simple. You had a timeline. Year three followed year two, followed year one. If you could count, you could understand time. Seconds ticked by, one after the other, everything travelling in the same direction, nothing going faster than the speed of light.

Simple.

The elder races of the universe understood this. A small child could understand it, of course, but we need to remind ourselves that the elder races understood this, too. Once upon a time. unlike small children, the elder races were in no rush. They were, on the whole, immortal – living a long time being, of course, one of the prerequisites for being an elder race in the first place. And, time being a very simple concept to grasp, most of them could see the future, in the same way that if you count to ten you can count to a trillion, if you have the inclination. The universe was an elegant, beautiful place back then. A single, harmonious note. It was a golden age. Really it was. For the first few billion years, nothing was wrong and nothing ever went wrong. Even the bad things that happened were good – that's to say they happened for a good reason, and lessons were learned. It wasn't stagnant, either. Nothing was ever dull. It was an age of heroism, of exploration, of discovery. Above all else, it was a time of progress. That's what time did, then. Progressed. Everything progressed, everything got better with age. Giants walked the earth, standing on the shoulders of giants. Literally, sometimes, if the mood took them. It was the golden age that all the legends describe, that all the politicians hark back to, the one that you vaguely remember yourself, back when things were simple and sunny.

Well, without naming names, one of the elder races managed to completely fuck it all up in an afternoon.

Very early on, mathematicians, philosophers, physicists, fantasists and who knows who else all realised that, theoretically, it was possible to travel in time. The physicists even jokingly pointed out that if you managed to – hee hee – find (or create) a very specific type of supermassive black hole – snicker – one that had a singularity that was exactly the right shape, and – ho ho – somehow managed to get it spinning in a certain way and – fnarr fnarr – bent a couple of spare dimensions around a bit until they faced the other way, then somehow – oh, you're killing me – developed a forcefield that would stop you from instantly being annihilated by all the anti-matter, radiation and raw temporal forces, then – it's a cracker – managed to find a way to both access the singularity and keep the event horizon, then finally – stop me if you've heard this one – you could harness the resultant energy to create a working time machine.

Perhaps it was inevitable that someone would go and do just that, ending up with a time machine.

And, then, that evening, suddenly the timeline stopped being an elegant parabola. Now it was a squiggle, with branches off and crossing out and gaps and bits which repeated each other, or cancelled each other out. Suddenly nothing made sense, except on a very, very local level.

You'd think, what with being able to see the future, that the elder races of the universe would have seen it coming. They did, of course, they'd just got the order wrong. They'd assumed that five o'clock would follow four o'clock, that six o'clock would show up soon after five, and that – crucially – this would hold true for everyone.

The next six days were, it's fair to say, pretty traumatic for all concerned. The elder races tended to do four things.

1. Go mad.

2. Leave.

3. Get killed.

4. Regress.

Some did all four, some only managed one of the above.

It was one of those times where people tried new ideas. One chap dressed as a Chinese mandarin and became obsessed with toys and games. Some went into hiding, or left the universe altogether. A couple of groups decided to swarm across the universe destroying all life.

Because, suddenly, anything went and everything was up for grabs.

Within a generation, it had all settled down again. The golden age was over, what with the hordes of ancient evils trying to drain the life from whole planets and all, but it was clear that an uncertain future and a squiggling, subjective timeline was "it" from now on.

What was also clear was that Time had been invalided out, and needed someone to look after it. And who better to look after an invalid than …

Mister Saldaamir.

Saldaamir was at a loose end. The Time Wars had wiped out not only his home planet, but his adopted home planet. He was the last of his race, and the unhappening of his planet had robbed him of his family, his memory, his companions.

The usual.

He needed to root himself to a new location, of course, and did that in the normal fashion with a hasty marriage of convenience to a passing witch. He rarely saw his wife after their eventful wedding night, although he did insist on being called *Mister* Saldaamir, and wears a ring made of blue gold.

So … what can we say about Mister Saldaamir? He's a smartly dressed humanoid, around six foot three, immortal, of average build, politely-spoken and bright blue. He can't be killed by conventional means. He can't travel in time, by any method at all except the slow way. But he knows enough about the future to be in the right place at the right time. He has teeth sharp enough to bite clean through bone and is the fourteenth oldest

being in the universe. He lives in San Francisco, and has done since the late Cretaceous, as it's the home of a number of interesting temporal anomalies.

He's always kept in touch with a small number of likeminded individuals. There are, by definition, only a handful of likeminded individuals.

Mister Saldaamir protects the timeline. He's not too worried about people changing history, or exterminating other people. That stuff happens. It doesn't matter, particularly, what happens to the timeline. What matters is that there is a timeline, however messed up. Mister Saldaamir has seen the future, he's seen Last Contact, and it worries him. While there's still time, there's still hope.

***MOTHER* FESTEN [*Eddie Robson*]** One of the Faction's most extrovert members, Mother Festen is best known for two things. One was that, as her own personal gesture of defiance to the Great Houses' attitude towards reproduction, she had her body surgically altered to give the perennial appearance of pregnancy. She had hoped that this might catch on, much as the Grandfather's use of costumes of bone had, but it didn't. At all.

The other thing that she is known for is the disastrous experiments on Ostenthal, which she spearheaded. Ostenthal was a human colony world which was cut off from the rest of human space by the Faction, then surreptitiously influenced by them for over two hundred years. Its colonists were selected for treatments that were designed to increase time sensitivity. If successful, this would be of great value to their recruits from the lesser species. Festen developed the technique, and was assigned to oversee the tests.

Not only did the technique not work, it also caused fatal birth defects in the children of all those affected, and the Faction's attempts to rectify the problems only made it worse. Due to the use of nanites in the experiments, the condition had mutated into a virus and gradually spread through the entire colony, until no viable children were being born anywhere and ultimately the whole colony had to be written off as a cock-up. This followed hot on the heels of the collapse of Father Katzmary's work on Minimediras, and for many years afterwards the Faction became very suspicious of eccentric scientist types. Festen was not permitted back into the Faction and was left stranded on Ostenthal.

The population aged and died off, with two exceptions – Mother Festen, and Tanya Glassman – and these two lived unaware of each other's presence for some years. Festen was afraid to speak of her mistakes when there were still people to speak to, but after she was left alone, she began to feel surprisingly guilty, and wished that she had admitted her culpability to the people of Ostenthal. These impulses were left caged until she encountered Tanya: by this time, she found it unbearable and she simply broke down and admitted what she had done, hoping for forgiveness. It didn't quite work out that way: Tanya killed Festen with her bare hands and threw her corpse out of a window.

INSTANT ANIMALS [*Simon Bucher-Jones*] William T. Cox, in his book *Fearsome Creatures of the Lumberwoods, with a Few Desert and Mountain Beasts* published Judd & Detweiller 1911, described the Squonk thus:

Few people outside of Pennsylvania have ever heard of the … beast … common in the hemlock forests of that State. The squonk is … said … to be the most morbid of beasts. Hunters who are good at tracking are able to follow a squonk by its tear-stained trail, for the animal weeps constantly. When cornered and escape seems impossible, or when surprised and frightened, it may even dissolve itself in tears.

Father Stendec isolated the active ingredient in squonk tears as part of his cryptozoological researches for Faction Paradox, and the resultant material has been likened to the infamous liquid of the alchemists, the "Alkahest" that would dissolve any container – and which proverbially quickly vanished upon discovery because of the sovereign problem of what to keep it in. (Presumably a hollow cavity at the centre of the Earth's gravitational field now contains a globular lake of the stuff, into which luckless subterrestrial travellers occasionally fatally intrude.)

In the case of squonk tears there is, however, an obvious solution. Father Stendec stored it in bulbs of tanned squonk skin and decanted it when needed through pippettes made of the interior of the squonk's tear-ducts. Stendec further discovered that the squonk's last ditch defense was not so futile as it appeared: the creature would indeed liquify itself, but it would also reconstitute itself from the liquid form once the danger had passed. The liquid carries a saturated solution of biodata, out of which the animal can – in effect – crystalise. Father Stendec is rumoured to have, through experimentation, fractionally distilled a variety of squonk tear based liquids that can carry "seed" animals of other species. When a rhinoceros suddenly appears in a compartment of the London Eye, it is this technology that is being deployed.

ACANIBUS [*Eddie Robson*] When the Great Houses planned to revive the 406th President's plan to terraform other worlds in order to provide bolt-holes in the event of the Homeworld being threatened, they embarked on a wide-ranging survey to identify the most suitable planets for this purpose. When the Faction became aware of this, it embarked on its own survey and identified the planet Acanibus as one of the most likely to be selected for the project. With this information, they could attempt to undermine the Great Houses' contingency plan.

With this in mind, the Faction placed a hidden presence on Acanibus: one of the city-states used in the Minimediras Project. The island was placed beneath the sea, was made as invisible as they could make it and shielded from the effects of the Great Houses' terraforming technology. Accordingly, when Acanibus was selected by the Great Houses for terraforming, Minimediras went entirely unnoticed, the only abnormality on a planet that, by now, otherwise resembled the Homeworld in every way. It remained undetected for over a hundred years by the skeleton holding force left behind by the Great Houses. (To leave such a small force on their back-up worlds was unwise, but the President insisted that no more of their people could be spared. Also, residual arrogance led them to believe for some while that the clone-worlds would not be required.)

The world that had once been Acanibus fell very suddenly from the Great Houses' control following a surprise attack from the Minimedirans, after their Goddess, Tanya Glassman, returned. She had convinced the Minimedirans that the purpose of their existence was to rise up and take the planet as their own, and also demonstrated that many of the things that they believed to be relics were, in fact, pieces of advanced Faction technology that would make the victory possible.

Most accounts state that Acanibus fell within a day, although these were all written by Minimedirans: in the days following the battle, a number of histories, narratives, poems, songs and essays were composed by the victorious side and broadcast into space in celebration. (This is also how we came by Marcel Quantas' authorised biography of Tanya.) However, it is true that the holding force would have expected any attack to come from

without, and this suggests why the Minimedirans' coup succeeded where other Faction attempts to sabotage the Houses' work failed.

Having taken the planet for her own, Tanya operated the 'jaunt' facility installed in the planet by the Great Houses (a facility designed to permit each clone-world to be positioned as a decoy at a moment's notice) and Acanibus vanished. To their consternation, the Great Houses discovered that their remote tracking and operation systems had been completely disabled, and nobody has ever been able to establish just where Tanya took the planet. The level of Faction involvement in her life, however, suggests that its work with her was not over.

The incident with Acanibus demonstrated just how thinly the Great Houses had spread their efforts by this stage. With Faction weaponry, the force there was all too easy to knock out and reinforcements could not be sent until it was too late. Plans such as the 'clone-world' project were far too ambitious for them to sustain by this stage of the War: nonetheless, a replacement 'clone' was created to replace Acanibus.